

BACK PAIN

I am pregnant with my first baby and my back has been very painful for the past four weeks. I am also getting shooting pains into my left buttock and leg. Could this be sciatica? I am worried it will get worse as my bump gets bigger.

The symptoms you describe could be as a result of either sciatica or pelvic girdle pain (PGP). Contrary to popular belief, you are not more susceptible to sciatica when you are pregnant. Aches brought on by pregnancy tend to be in the pelvis and back, not around the sciatic nerve. Many women who think they have sciatica during pregnancy actually have pelvic girdle pain. The sciatic nerve comes from your lower back, travels down the back of your leg and then branches out to your foot. Inflammation or pressure from the back can make the sciatic nerve painful, resulting in aching in the buttock, thigh, calf or foot. You may develop other symptoms such as pins and needles, or numbness in the leg or foot. Sciatica in pregnancy can be caused by inflammation of the facet joints in the lower back, or by the baby pressing onto the sciatic nerve inside the pelvis. It is very important that you are assessed by your chartered physiotherapist, as soon as possible, to determine if it is a sciatic nerve problem or PGP. You will need prompt treatment to minimise your symptoms as your pregnancy progresses.



ACHING FEET

I had my first baby a few weeks ago and I am having trouble walking. In the last few weeks of pregnancy, my feet swelled and swelled. It became hard to walk. I thought once the baby arrived that it would ease. While the swelling is certainly less (I can get into my shoes again!), I still have constant aching in the arches of my feet and it's stopping me from getting out walking. Help!

You should see your chartered physiotherapist as soon as possible to get this assessed, as there are a few things that could be causing this. It takes up to six months for your ligaments to firm up again after giving birth. The ligaments in your feet support the joints bearing your body weight, so lax ligaments can cause increased pressure on the arches of the feet in the post-natal phase. We can ease this by taping, giving you strengthening exercises for the muscles of the feet, or by prescribing a temporary corrective device, such as an insole, to lift your arch again. You may have had flat feet prior to being pregnant, and your alignment through your legs and hips could be adding to the pressure on your feet. That coupled with the lax ligaments can further flatten your arches, and even make you go up a shoe size temporarily. You may need some insoles or orthotics to help correct this. There may be a trapped nerve causing your pain, although this is less likely if it is in both feet, and without pins and needles. It is important to diagnose and treat this as soon as possible, so your postnatal exercise won't cause any damage or increase your pain. At home, try not to stand for periods of time on hard tiles in your bare feet - wear your runners if possible to support your arches.



Jenny Branigan is a chartered physiotherapist and partner at Total Physio in Sandyford, Co Dublin, and sees many women during and after pregnancy, treating issues like pelvic girdle pain. She is also mum to Jamie and Holly. For more information see www.totalphysio.ie

These answers are not a substitute for a full assessment by your chartered physiotherapist. If you are suffering with any pain or injury, please contact your local chartered physiotherapist who specialises in treating pregnant and postnatal women. It is vital to deal promptly with these aches and pains and they will only get worse as your bump and baby get bigger and heavier.