

LEAKING URINE

I had my first baby three weeks ago. I practised my pelvic floor exercises as I was shown. But I now notice that when I cough, I “leak” a bit of urine. Is this normal?

This is a common problem, but one that should resolve naturally by six weeks postnatally. The pelvic floor muscles (levator ani) are attached at the front to the pubic bone, to the lateral walls of the pelvis at the sides and to the coccyx at the back. They support the pelvic organs from back to front and are responsible for bladder and bowel control, organ support and sexual function. Many pregnant women develop some bladder weakness during pregnancy, as a result of the extra weight on the pelvic floor muscles. When you have had your baby, depending on your delivery, there can be loss of control of the pelvic floor muscles or indeed overactivity of these muscles, which can lead to leaking or stress incontinence. Many new mums suffer from this problem, and leaks can occur when you laugh, cough, run or jump. If the leaking persists after your six week check-up, you will need some expert help to resolve it. This is a specialised area of physiotherapy, so make sure the Chartered Physiotherapist you see is a trained Women's Health Physiotherapist.



SHOULDER PAIN

I am 23 weeks' pregnant and working full time. Recently I have noticed that the area between my shoulder blades gets very sore when I sit in long meetings. Should I see a physio or is this normal?

The area around your shoulder blades is part of your upper back or thoracic spine, and is a common area of pain during pregnancy. The upper spine supports the weight of your growing breasts and has to accommodate for postural changes due to those changing breasts and increasing bump size. These postural changes can cause the upper spine to become stiff and sore as the pregnancy progresses, and may even result in pain when you cough or take a deep breath. Luckily the upper spine is very straightforward and very safe area to treat. Your Chartered Physiotherapist can treat you lying on your side, or in a special seated position to ease out those stiff joints and tight muscles. Taping can be very beneficial for postural re-education and reducing pain. You will also be given some safe and simple postural strengthening exercises that you can do throughout your pregnancy to fully resolve your symptoms. Taking up a Pregnancy Pilates class would also be a good idea at this stage, as Pilates has a great emphasis on postural strength and upper spine movements. Note that it is recommended to wait until you have passed 16 weeks before starting Pregnancy Pilates.



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