

# Ask the physiotherapist

## SORE RIBS

**Q** I have had a pretty easy pregnancy so far, but in the past three weeks my ribs feel very sore when I am sitting down. It is only on the left side. Is there anything that can help ease this pain? I have three more weeks left of work, which involves sitting at a desk all day.

**A** The rib cage has to greatly expand as your pregnancy progresses to make room for your growing uterus and to maintain your lung capacity. This expansion pressure on the ribs can manifest as pain and can be further compounded by big baby kicks into the already aching area.

Try to move around regularly and take regular breaks from sitting. Walk to the toilets furthest away to keep your body moving. Walk over to the photocopier, printer or coffee station yourself, rather than accepting help from well-meaning colleagues. Go for a walk during lunchtime to give your body a break from sitting down.

Practise deep breathing exercises while sitting comfortably. Inhale deeply through the nose, hold it for three seconds and exhale out through your mouth. Repeat five times every few hours.

Stretch the rib area gently by getting onto your hands and knees and rolling your hips towards your right heel and then towards your left heel in a circular motion. Do five circles slowly in each direction. Discontinue if your wrists get sore in this position.

muscles were stretched during your pregnancy as your bump grew. Even though your abdominal muscles no longer have to support your baby and bump, it takes time for these muscles to get back into shape and for normal muscle tone to be restored. During this time (which can take up to six months in some women), there are decreased levels of support for the lower back, causing feelings of weakness from normal daily tasks.

A visit to your chartered physiotherapist, who is used to dealing with postnatal women, might help. She can assess your abdominal muscle strength and give you some safe and gentle exercises to start with to

improve the stability of your lower back and pelvis. Postnatal Pilates may also be a good option for you, once you are past six weeks in the case of a normal delivery, or ten weeks if you had a Caesarean section. ♥

*Please note:  
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 as they will only get worse as your baby gets bigger and heavier.*

## TUMMY RECOVERY

**Q** Is there anything I can do to help my tummy muscles recover after all the stretching during pregnancy?

**A** Yes! Ask your chartered physiotherapist in the hospital for some fitted Tubigrip for your abdominal area and wear it during the day for the first six weeks. This will also help if you are feeling weak in your back.

The compression of the tubigrip helps to reduce swelling, move stagnant lymph out of the area, stabilises the skin, facilitates shrinking of your uterus and, if you had a Caesarean section, it also supports the healing wound.

Massaging your tummy muscles is very beneficial for

improving your circulation and healing. If you had a Caesarean section, you will not be able to massage around the wound until the scar has fully healed (approximately nine to 12 weeks after the birth). Massaging the scar helps to make it supple and less sensitive and should be continued until the scar feels pain-free to touch, which can take a few months.

## WEAK BACK

**Q** My baby is three weeks old and doing great. But my lower back is feeling very weak all the time. Is this normal?

**A** Yes, this is very normal. Your abdominal muscles act like a corset, giving support to your lower back. These



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