

# Ask the physiotherapist

## RIB CAGE PRESSURE

**Q** I finish work in two weeks but find I cannot sit for long periods at my desk due to pain under my right ribs. Driving also aggravates the pain. What can I do?

**A** Towards the end of pregnancy, rib pain can be very common. The ribcage has to greatly expand as your pregnancy progresses to make room for your growing uterus and to maintain your lung capacity. This expansion puts pressure on the ribs and can manifest as pain, which is further compounded by baby kicks into the already aching area. Try these tips:

- Practise deep breathing exercises while sitting comfortably. Inhale deeply through the nose, hold it for

three seconds and exhale out of the mouth. Repeat five times every few hours.

- Give your ribcage a stretch 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.
- Lying down on the opposite side to the painful ribs with a cushioned support under your bump can help ease the pain by taking all the weight off the ribs. Try to do this after a long day at work or a car journey.

## PELVIC PAIN

**Q** I am 25 weeks pregnant and have started to feel

pain in the front of my pelvis when I get out of bed to go to the toilet at night. What is causing this and can I do anything to ease it?

**A** Pain in the front of the pelvis is often a sign of pelvic girdle pain (PGP), a significant problem for up to 20 per cent of pregnant women, which can occur at any stage of pregnancy (even before 12 weeks). It may come on suddenly, or start gradually.

The symptoms of PGP include pubic joint pain and tenderness to touch, pain or stiffness in the mid or lower back, catching or sharp groin pain, and pain or a pulling sensation in the lower abdominal muscles, inner thigh or the front of the thigh. This pain will make it difficult to use the stairs, turn over in bed, or to go from sitting to standing. Pain when walking can be a factor later in pregnancy and can range from feeling discomfort when walking, to developing a waddling gait, to even needing crutches for support.

Luckily, PGP is very treatable. Make sure to attend a chartered physiotherapist used to dealing with pregnant women if you are feeling any of these symptoms mentioned. The earlier your symptoms are identified and diagnosed, the better the prognosis for your recovery.

## FIT FOR PREGNANCY

**Q** I'm pregnant on my third baby but I'm probably the least fit I've ever been. What exercises can I do now if I haven't been exercising prior to my pregnancy?

**A** Many women wonder what they can do to maintain previous levels of fitness and to strengthen their bodies in preparation for labour. Regardless of your pre-pregnancy levels, your fitness goals during pregnancy should be aimed at maintenance and not dramatic gains.

It is important to keep the muscles in your back and legs strong to support you as your bump is growing. Target these muscles with regular exercises, like walking or swimming. Workouts in the pool are very beneficial as the buoyancy of the water supports your growing uterus while working your abdominal muscles. Pregnancy Pilates or yoga classes can be very beneficial but ensure that your instructor is specifically trained in pregnancy care, as the exercises differ from those for the normal population.

Pelvic floor strengthening should also be done from the time you find out that you are pregnant as these muscles will need increased support as your uterus grows and becomes heavier in the later stages of pregnancy. ♥

## UNSTEADY BALANCE

**Q** I am 33 weeks pregnant with my first baby and feeling very unsteady on my feet. Is this normal?

**A** Yes! During pregnancy your body undergoes many changes. In the third trimester, the hormone relaxin causes the ligaments of your body to loosen, which can affect your balance. Your ever-growing bump and any associated weight gain will also move your centre of gravity towards the front of your body. These changes can lead to a loss of stability and increase your risk of falling. Avoid wearing heels, especially in the third trimester, as this will further compromise your balance. Take your time when moving around, especially if you are in unfamiliar surroundings.



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