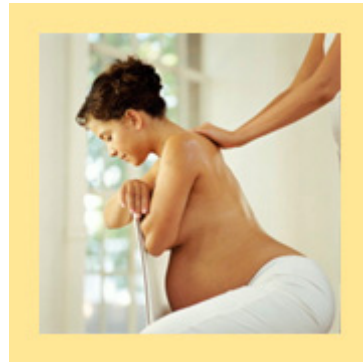


## Coping with backache and sciatica



Pregnancy hormones relax joints, ligaments & muscles & weight gain increases the curve in your lower back, causing backache. The weight of your enlarging breasts can cause upper backache, rib pain & heartburn. Sciatica, a sharp shooting pain down your legs, is due to pressure on the nerve. Coccyx (tailbone) pain, often due to tiny fractures from a fall or previous delivery, can also flare up in pregnancy - the only treatment is rest. Ask your midwife to refer you to a physiotherapist sooner, rather than later as these discomforts usually get worse as pregnancy progresses.

Use your body efficiently: Stand straight, point your chin down & avoid excess walking which may strain ligaments. In bed, use lots of pillows; keep your thighs parallel to prevent your top leg twisting across your body (recovery position). To get out of bed, roll on your side, push up until sitting & stand up slowly. Try not to bend down to lift toddlers & *never* carry them on your hip. Use a trolley for shopping, carry small bags in both hands rather than one large one. If possible sit down to iron. Avoid constant bending & stretching to empty the dishwasher, clean the bath & vacuum. Wear comfortable shoes with broad heels. Get fitted for a maternity bra with wide straps & adequate cups, to avoid strain on your shoulders & rib cage. When driving, sit tall, make yourself comfortable – *then* adjust your rear view mirror. You may need to do this morning & evening as your posture changes during the day. Ask for a seat on the bus, train or tube – or change your work hours to travel off-peak. At work, use extra cushions for support; ask for an orthopaedic chair; keep both feet on the floor and don't cross your legs. Adjust your PC screen so you're not hunched over the keyboard & avoid stretching to your mouse mat. If your work involves standing, shift from one foot to the other to ease aches, & sit down when possible. Gentle walking & stretching may relieve stiffness & pain. Swimming can help but if you use breast stroke, keep your neck and spine straight with your face in the water. Pregnancy water exercise classes, yoga, tai chi, Alexander technique or relaxation may also help. It's fine to continue going to the gym but be aware of your body's response & adapt your techniques as necessary, sip plenty of water & don't get over-heated.

Complementary therapies: Back massage can ease pain but avoid direct thumb pressure in the small of your back - several acupuncture points here can stimulate labour. Shoulder, neck & head massage is relaxing and eases pain but don't work too deeply over your collar bones - there are more acupuncture points here. If you have sciatica, avoid direct back massage until the real cause is known. A gentle, full body or back, neck & shoulders massage from a therapist experienced in treating pregnant mums can be very relaxing. Add relaxing aromatherapy oils eg ylang ylang or lavender, to your bath in the last few weeks of pregnancy - use 4 drops in a teaspoon of carrier oil. Warm water bottles or heat pads are also good. Visit a therapist for reflexology, or if the pain is severe, consult an acupuncturist, osteopath or chiropractor. If the pain makes you weary, try Bach flower Rescue Remedy, 4 drops & olive, 2 drops in water 4 hourly, or rub Rescue Remedy cream on the affected area. Homeopathic remedies must be prescribed individually, and herbal medicines should be used with care – many of the remedies traditionally used for backache should not be taken in pregnancy.

**Always inform your midwife if you are taking natural remedies or consulting a complementary practitioner.**