

Coping with Symphysis pubis pain



During pregnancy, hormones relax all the joints & ligaments of your skeleton, especially the large joint at the front of your pelvis – the symphysis pubis, or pubic area. This makes the joint unstable, causing pain & discomfort in your pelvis, groin & legs & difficulty in walking, & may begin to affect your ability to go about your normal daily activities. Increasing weight as your baby grows will add extra strain & you may also suffer backache & sciatica (shooting pains down your legs). If you experience this discomfort it's important to inform your midwife so she can refer you for physiotherapy treatment sooner, rather than later. The physiotherapist can teach you special exercises which may ease the pain, & can provide a maternity belt for support or even crutches or a walking frame if necessary.

There are a few things you can do yourself to minimise the pain. Avoid lifting, twisting & vigorous activity which causes you additional pain. Keep your knees together as much as possible – getting in & out of bed or a car, for example, & keep your body straight when you're sitting or lying down. Some women find it helpful to squeeze a ball between their knees when sitting as this is thought to strengthen the muscles & ligaments. Take great care when getting out of the shower or bath, to avoid slipping, & if paths are icy in winter. When shopping, use a trolley & carry small bags in both hands rather than one large bag – or consider online shopping. Never carry a toddler on your hip, even when not pregnant. You will probably find it painful to open your legs wide enough to have full sex, so use this as an opportunity to explore alternative positions & just enjoy being together, cuddling or massaging each other. You may wish to consult an osteopath or a chiropractor who specialises in treating pelvic problems, & several research studies suggest that acupuncture can also have a positive effect on pubic pain. Other complementary therapies which may help include reflexology, but ensure the therapist has experience of treating this problem in mums-to-be. Massage & aromatherapy can be relaxing but will not really treat the problem; any relief is usually temporary. Even with the other therapies you may need ongoing treatment throughout your pregnancy to keep the pain at bay. Before labour, test out how far you can open your knees until you start to feel pain; measure this & inform your midwife. It may be possible to lie on your left side for internal examinations in labour & for delivery, rather than propped up on your back. Remind everyone about your pain if you have to have your legs put in stirrups (lithotomy) eg for a forceps delivery, but it may be possible to have any necessary stitches done without being in lithotomy. Don't worry if you need extra pain relief, especially in labour, when an epidural may help.

A useful source of further advice & support is the Pelvic Partnership –
www.pelvicpartnership.org.uk

Always inform your midwife if you are consulting a private complementary therapist