

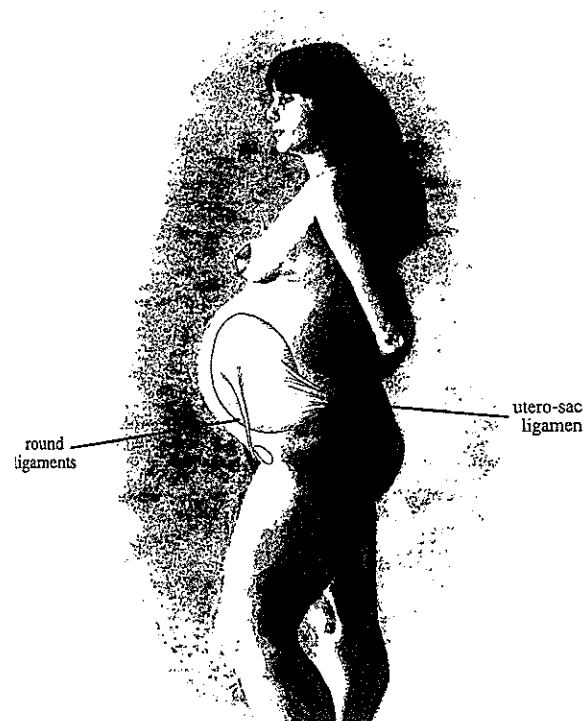
Common Aches and Pains in Pregnancy

Throughout pregnancy, you may feel various aches and pains. Some women experience a relatively problem free pregnancy, and other women experience a range of symptoms that can at best be mildly irritating and at worst be very uncomfortable. Discomforts are often a normal part of pregnancy. Being aware of your body and understanding the changes that are happening can help reduce anxiety, and help you implement ways to keep you self as comfortable as possible.

Following is a list of common pregnancy discomforts. A summary of what is NOT normal be found at the end.

- ◆ Morning sickness – approx 80% of pregnant women experience some degree of nausea and vomiting in early pregnancy. For some women this can, unfortunately, last into the second trimester. See separate hand out on nausea and vomiting, and ask to your midwife if you feel that your morning sickness is not well controlled.
- ◆ Urinary frequency – in early pregnancy, you may need to empty your bladder frequently due to hormonal changes. As your pregnancy progresses, your growing uterus puts pressure on your bladder and you will need to pass the urine frequently. If you experience pain or burning when passing urine, you may be starting a urinary tract infection. Speak to your midwife if this is a case.
- ◆ Breast tenderness – often experienced in early pregnancy due to hormonal changes in the body. Wear a bra that is comfortable and provides good support. You will probably need a bigger bra as your breast increase in size throughout your pregnancy.
- ◆ Shortness of breath and palpitations – many changes are happening in the circulatory system. Your heart has to work harder to pump the extra blood volume around your rapidly changing body. As your body grows, your lungs have less space to expand. Keeping your iron level high will help reduce shortness of breath. Resting should make these symptoms disappear. Speak to your midwife if they do not.
- ◆ Light headedness / fainting – often experienced in early pregnancy due to changes in blood pressure and metabolism. Eat frequently to keep your blood sugar levels steady, and change your position slowly if you have been lying or sitting down. Get plenty of rest.

- ◆ Constipation – can be a problem throughout pregnancy due to effects of progesterone (a hormone) on the gastro-intestinal system. The bowel movements slow down, which means more water is absorbed and the stool becomes harder. As your pregnancy progresses the weight of the uterus compresses the lower bowel. Taking iron supplements can also contribute to constipation. Plenty of fluids, regular exercise, and a fiber rich diet will help prevent constipation.
- ◆ Fatigue – commonly experienced in early pregnancy due to hormonal changes, and in the postpartum period due to interrupted sleep pattern. The golden rule is to sleep as much as you can, whenever you can. Getting sufficient rest is essential for your physical and emotional well being.
- ◆ Back pain – lower back ache is a very common pregnancy discomfort. The pelvic ligaments soften, resulting in weaker support for your upper body. As your baby grows the abdominal muscles pull on the back muscles to which they are attached. Because the ligaments are weaker due to effects of the hormone relaxin, it is easier to injure your back during pregnancy. Carry heavier objects (or small children!) close to your body, pay attention to good posture, and modify your movements to reduce strain on your back.
- ◆ Ligament pain – often felt as sharp, shooting pains into the groin as pregnancy progresses. This is usually caused by strain on the round ligaments which support the growing uterus. Walking, sudden movement, coughing, sneezing or exercising can trigger the pain. If you experience these sharp pains, gently massage the area and rest. It should settle down in half an hour.



- ◆ Leg cramps – commonly felt at night and can be caused by the pressure of your uterus on the nerves in your legs, fatigue, or dietary imbalance. Increase your calcium intake may be helpful.
- ◆ Heartburn / indigestion – can be very bothersome as your pregnancy advances. It is caused by acid leaking out of the stomach back up the esophagus. The sphincter which normally prevents this from happening is also affected by pregnancy hormones and doesn't close as firmly as result. Avoiding spicy and greasy foods and eating smaller meals can help reduce heartburn. Over the counter anti-acids are usually safe to take, as are natural based remedies such as papaya enzymes.
- ◆ Sharp pubic pain – the ligament known as the symphysis pubis connected the front pelvic bones. This ligament softens during pregnancy, allowing a small degree of movement or rubbing in this area of the pelvis. It can be extremely uncomfortable, and give you a sense of “heaviness” in the vagina. Keeping your knees together as much as possible when changing positions helps to reduce the strain on symphysis pubis.
- ◆ Rib pain – towards the end of pregnancy your baby may be pushing up under your ribs, looking for any little bit of extra space! Your ribs will move slightly outwards to accommodate your baby, and this may cause your some discomfort. Once the baby starts to descend into the pelvis you will probably become more comfortable under your ribs.
- ◆ Vaginal aching / heaviness – usually felt once the baby starts to engage into the pelvis. You may notice this more if you have had several babies already, or if you have a weak pelvic floor. Doing your pelvic floor (Kegels) regularly will help limit this discomfort. **Vaginal Pain associated with bleeding, uterine cramping, offensive discharge or vaginal itching is not normal and you should contact your midwife if this is a case.**
- ◆ Deep lower abdominal / pelvis pain – felt at the end of pregnancy usually indicates the cervix softening and changing in preparation for labour.

Suggestions for reducing common discomforts in pregnancy:

- ◆ Keep your body strong with regular exercise and good nutrition. Walking, swimming, modified aerobics and yoga are popular options for keeping fit without straining the body.
 - Pelvic rock: on hands and knees, keep back straight and head aligned with the spine. Exhale in 4 counts while rounding the entire back and tilting the pelvis towards the abdomen (like a cat arching) hold 4 counts, return to a straight back. Repeat 5 times. This can be done in the shower with the water spraying on your back.
 - Pelvic tilt: inhale to expand abdomen, exhale and contract abdominals inward while rotating the top of the pelvis upwards toward the navel, hold for 5 counts. Do 10-15 times daily. Strengthens abdominals, improves posture and relives strain on the lower back. You can do this sitting, standing or lying down.

- ◆ Wear supportive, well fitting shoes with low heels
- ◆ Pay attention to good posture. Bend at your knees and lift your legs. Roll onto your side and push yourself into a sitting position using your arms rather than pulling yourself up using your back and abdominal muscles.
- ◆ See a massage therapist or a chiropractor for adjustments on a regular basis
- ◆ Use pillows to support your back and between your knees when you sleep to take the strain off your muscles.
- ◆ Relax in a warm bath, or place warm compresses over aching area
- ◆ Avoid standing for long periods. If your job requires you to stand, try putting one foot on a low stool.
- ◆ Homeopathic and herbal remedies can be useful in keeping your body in balance. Speak to a homeopath for advice. Commonly used remedies include arnica and hypericum.

WHEN IS PAIN NOT NORMAL?

Certain pains can indicate a reason for concern. These generally include:

- Excruciating pain (anywhere) that comes on suddenly and does not go away after resting
- Pain associated with vaginal bleeding
- Back or abdominal cramping or pain (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) that come in a regular pattern and are getting stronger
- Constant lower abdominal pain
- A red, painful area on the back of your calf
- A sharp pain in your chest or upper back
- Headaches accompanied with “flashing lights” in your eyes and sudden oedema (Swelling) of your face, hands and feet