

THE ROLE OF THE SPINE THERAPIST DURING PREGNANCY

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Pregnancy can be one of the most enjoyable times for a soon-to-be mother, or it can be a very long, uncomfortable period of life.

Pregnancy places various stresses on a woman's body. Some of these stressors can lead to the development of back and/or pelvic pain that can range from intermittent to constant pains that radiate into the buttocks or the legs.

This article will look at the process of pregnancy from a spine rehabilitation professional's perspective and provide strategies to assist the pregnant patient in caring for her back before, during and after birth. As with any exercise program, never begin without seeking the advice of your physician first.

PRE-PREGNANT MOTHER

If the pre-pregnant mother is asymptomatic prior to a planned pregnancy, the most important factors to consider are sitting and standing posture. Maintaining normal spinal curves present in the standing position is recommended for the sitting position. General stretching and strengthening of the abdominals and back muscles (core muscles) is advisable. Maintaining overall fitness is recom-

mended as well and can often be continued well into the pregnancy.

A woman who is symptomatic and experiencing back pain but contemplating getting pregnant can plan ahead to prepare the spine for the added stress and weight involved in childbirth. Once the mother is evaluated by her physician, a spine rehabilitation professional can assist in the care plan.



The spine therapist will perform a mechanical assessment to determine the nature of the painful condition and establish the appropriate exercises and postural strategies. Treatment is based upon the assessment findings and includes education and

exercises to perform regularly to correct the condition and prevent the issue from causing pain during pregnancy. Ultimately, strengthening of the core musculature of the abdominals, the back and the hips will likely be incorporated into the rehabilitation program at the proper time. The goal is to eliminate back pain prior to conception.

LOW BACK PAIN DURING PREGNANCY

Low back pain that has its onset during pregnancy is more complex in nature because of the many changes that take place in a woman's body. Hormonal changes and postural adaptations can cause symptoms to develop in the spine and/or pelvis. The most common structural change affects the lumbar spine. It is frequently observed while standing that the arch in the low back (lumbar lordosis) increases during pregnancy and can cause pain. While this does occur in a number of women, recent research has revealed that some women actually experience a reduction in the lumbar lordosis.

Occupational and lifestyle factors may also play a role. For example, if a pregnant woman spends the majority of her workday sitting with a rounded or slouched posture, this may have more of an influence on her symptom development than the changes noted in her low back curve when she is standing. The use of a lumbar roll or support designed for placement in the chair can be helpful to assist in maintaining the lumbar curve. For additional issues, a spine therapist can determine the nature of your specific condition and provide customized advice.

During the delivery process, the spine and pelvis undergo a great deal of mechanical stress. The lumbar spine is usually in a flexed or rounded position for varying amounts of time. The pelvic bones undergo a significant amount of stress during delivery and are occasionally overstrained, producing pain. During the weeks following delivery, if the normal postpartum discomfort does not improve, seeking the treatment of a spine physician and spine therapist may assist in resolving the symptoms. Treatments may include specific pain-relieving exercises, bracing for the pelvis and lumbar/pelvic muscular retraining exercises.

Spine physicians and therapists can assist women through all stages of their pregnancy to help prevent or decrease back and pelvis pain. For more information, contact our spine nurse Lori at (404) 531-8614. We wish you an enjoyable and pain-free pregnancy!

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