

Pregnancy

Having a baby?



No matter whether you are planning to have a baby, are pregnant or already have your little bundle, your body will never be quite the same again!

Pregnancy discomfort and how to deal with it

Contrary to popular myth, backache need not be an inevitable part of pregnancy. Your joints however, will slacken and become more susceptible to injury as more hormones are released, particularly towards the last trimester. Your body will need to adapt to changes in weight and shape. A large tummy can pull your spine forward, forcing your upper back to compensate for the forward drag. This is further aggravated if your breasts are heavy. Other problems may occur if the babies head engages posteriorly (facing towards your front). This may cause backache and compression of the sciatic nerve, producing symptoms which may include leg and buttock pain.

Tips

Try resting in positions in which the weight of the baby is tilted off the spine. For example: Try to rest on your left side, with a pillow between your legs, get onto all fours, or try a deep (but not too hot) bath.
When lying on your side, place a pillow under "the bump" for support.
Be sensible when lifting and bending. This is particularly difficult if you have a two stone toddler in hot pursuit.
Try to squat more and stoop less.
Improve your posture by tucking your bottom under whilst standing. Avoid high heel shoes.
Sit cross legged on the floor.
Try swimming from the beginning of pregnancy.

Other common problems

Pain under the rib cage can be due to the position and size of your baby, try sitting in straight firm chairs and lifting your arms above your head.

A stitch-like feeling in the stomach, particularly when standing up after sitting or lying down, may be caused by over stretching of the ligaments either side of your uterus, or by sneezing, coughing, laughing and lifting. Get up from lying by rolling onto one side, then use your arms, to push yourself up.
Try lifting your leg up or bending forwards when you sneeze or cough.
Any discomfort will be less painful if you move slowly.

Pain in the groin and pubic area. This is particularly common as you get heavier, and as the baby's head begins to engage. Avoid standing for too long, and change position frequently when sitting.

Cramp, especially of the calf, can be caused by metabolic changes, but most commonly the muscles simply tighten as your legs attempt to carry those extra couple of stones around! Regular simple calf stretches should stop the cramp and you could try raising the end of your bed a couple of inches. (Unless it really aggravates your heart burn!)

Aching pelvic floor, that bowling ball feeling, (you'll know it when you get it!). Increase the frequency of the pelvic floor exercises you were shown in ante-natal classes.

Restless legs. This should be eased by regular stretching of the muscles of the front and back of the thigh, as well as the calf.

Positions to avoid whilst pregnant

Avoid sitting for long periods, sit upright or slightly forward, don't sit with one leg crossed over the other.
Avoid carrying weights out to one side, try to carry centrally, preferably with both hands.
Avoid stooping for long periods and when you get the nesting instinct and just have to; scrub the floors, move the furniture, or paint the ceiling etc, do so sensibly!

In an ideal world

Childbirth is an exceptional act, a *tour de force*, partly instinct, partly knack. You need, not merely to have knowledge of pregnancy, labour and delivery, but also adequate physical preparation.

Your body will, in general, cope better through pregnancy, labour and motherhood if, before you start, you are:-

- ✍ Close to your ideal weight
- ✍ Have good abdominal tone
- ✍ Have good suppleness, stamina and strength.

Try to find a good ante-natal exercise, or yoga class and go to it regularly. Failing this, find a good ante-natal book (see overleaf) and follow their recommended exercise routine. Walk whenever you can. Being active will help protect your back and help the baby to engage in the best position for birth.

Can an osteopath help

If you are embarking on this journey with back, or other, (neck, knee, wrist) problems, it will be more difficult. Treatment can be given throughout pregnancy, although some techniques may not be used in the first three months.

Pick a good experienced therapist, ideally, recommended by friends or relatives and take advice on how to protect and maintain

any weak areas. (Phone them first for advice as to whether treatment is required).

You don't want your body to let you down near, during, or just after the birth of your baby, it's tough enough when you are 100%!

Back pain after delivery

Labour can be physically demanding, and may leave you feeling very tender. If you decide to have an epi-dural ask your midwife to ensure that the injection will be given by someone with experience.

Although the spine returns to its normal curvature quickly, muscle tone will take some time and work to firm up. Add to this the necessity of bending and lifting the baby, car seats, prams and other equipment, stooping over the bath, carrying the baby on one side, and simple fatigue, it can leave your body a bit vulnerable.

Allow, husbands, partners, friends and relatives to help you for a while.

Can the osteopath help at this stage?

Yes, but you will find it incredibly difficult to find or justify time for yourself once you have a family. Priorities simply change. It is important however, not to allow any existing or new problems to get really out of hand before seeking advice.



Recommended reading.

The best friends' guide to pregnancy by Vicki Iovine (practical and very humorous)
New Active Birth by Janet Balaskas
The New Pregnancy and Childbirth by Sheila Kitzinger

Join the **National Childbirth Trust** and take the ante-natal exercise and childbirth classes. The local membership secretary is:
Jane Johnson Tel: 01903 200264

HOMOEOPATHY can be extremely helpful during pregnancy and childbirth - see separate leaflets.