

Pregnancy and Low Back Pain

By Dr. Wes Dawkins

Pregnancy brings about a lot of changes in a woman's body and with these changes comes new health concerns they have never encountered before. Low back pain is often one of these. Back pain is reported in over half of all expecting mothers.

Back pain has a number of causes but there are two that are unique to pregnant women, the sudden weight gain and the elevated levels of hormones released during pregnancy. The weight gained during pregnancy is not the true cause of the low back pain but rather the location of the weight. Gaining weight in only one location, in front of the spine, can cause a lot of added stress on the joints, muscles and ligaments in the back. In addition to the weight gain, pregnant women release a hormone, relaxin, in high concentrations. As the name suggests it acts to relax ligaments making them more elastic. This allows the ligaments in the pelvis to stretch and create more space for the child during the birthing process. The problem is that the hormone acts on all the ligaments in the body, including the low back, making the joints more mobile, less stable and easier to irritate throughout the pregnancy. Combining this with the weight gain can cause some significant pain. Pregnant women often describe a catching sensation in back/buttock when bending over, walking and going from sitting to standing.

There are a variety of treatment options for back pain but being pregnant shortens the list significantly. Many women try to minimize any medications they might otherwise use. Additionally, many non-pharmacological options typically used in physical therapy, like therapeutic ultrasound and electrical stimulations, are not recommended.

This still leaves the expecting mother several choices. Hands on care, like massage therapy, can help to relieve the muscle pain and tension. Other safe options include chiropractic spinal adjustments that alleviate the sore and achy joints. Many women find a strengthening program designed for the muscles in the low back and pelvis significantly reduced their pain. Often something as simple as a stretching program can help alleviate the discomfort.

Of course these are only a few of the options available. Every woman is unique and the ideal treatment or combination of treatments will vary. But the reality is that most women simply accept that back pain is a part of pregnancy and do nothing about it. If you're expecting and experiencing back pain go see someone that can help. Pregnancy doesn't have to be a pain in the back.

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