

Low Back Pain in Pregnancy

There are many causes of low back pain (LBP) in pregnancy. Some common ones include:

- Pre-existing LBP from an old injury or existing condition
- Changes in posture during pregnancy
- Poor “core” muscle function
- Reduced activity level & prolonged sitting or lying
- Increased demand on muscles due to joint laxity
- Changed mechanics during tasks such as lifting and carrying

Self-Help Management

Posture – During pregnancy, your center of mass shifts forward as your uterus and breasts get larger. It takes a conscious effort to prevent your back from arching. It takes an equal amount of effort to sit up tall when you’re tired and in pain! In standing, tuck your tailbone under you to reduce the curve in your lower back. Bring your shoulders back and your chest high. In sitting, feel your weight over the bony part of your buttocks, not the fleshy part. Bring your shoulders back and your chest high.

Sleeping – It’s best to sleep with a pillow between your legs. You should lie on your side (left, preferably) and move as needed throughout the night to reduce discomfort. Avoid sleeping on your back or stomach. If this is not comfortable, you can also place a wedge under your right pelvis to lie in a position that’s halfway between your back and side. Remember the pillow between the knees!

Activity – It’s important to maintain a level of physical activity during pregnancy. This uses the “core” muscles and maintains their function and endurance. Try doing short intervals of housework and stretching. If you can, add some walking, swimming, dancing, or other whole-body activities. Avoid heavy lifting and contact sports. Aim to reduce the amount of time in one position, whether it’s on your feet or sitting down. Avoid heavy or repetitive lifting, including other children.

Exercises

Start with the “core” exercises found in that detailed handout.

Stretches (Hold each one for 30 seconds, do these at least once per day)

1. Flexion (modified child’s pose): start on your hands and knees, then rock back and sit on your heels. Spread your knees apart and bring your hands forward and your chest down.



2. Rotation: lie on your side. Twist your trunk and aim to get both shoulders touching the bed.
3. Flexion (standing): stand with feet under the hips. Lean your trunk forward onto a countertop, table, or chair.
4. Buttock stretch: sit on a chair. Place one foot on the opposite knee. Sit tall and push the knee down toward the floor.
5. Butterfly stretch: sit on a comfortable surface and bend your knees. Place the soles of your feet together and bring the heels toward your pelvis. Sit up tall.