



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
FAQ115  
PREGNANCY

## Easing Back Pain During Pregnancy

- **What causes back pain during pregnancy?**
- **What can I do to prevent back pain during pregnancy?**
- **What can I do to ease back pain?**
- **When should I contact my health care provider about back pain?**

### What causes back pain during pregnancy?

Back pain in pregnancy has many possible causes. It usually is caused by strain on the back muscles. In mid-pregnancy, when your uterus becomes heavier, your center of gravity changes. Your posture changes in response. Most women begin to lean backward in the later months of pregnancy, which makes their back muscles work harder.

Weakness of the abdominal muscles also can cause back pain. The abdominal muscles normally support the spine and play an important role in the health of the back. During pregnancy, these muscles become stretched and may weaken, causing some back pain. These changes also make you more prone to injury when you exercise.

Pregnancy hormones may contribute to back pain. To make your baby's passage through your pelvis easier, a hormone relaxes the ligaments in the strong, weight-bearing joints in the pelvis. This loosening makes the joints more flexible, but it can cause back pain if the joints become too mobile.

### What can I do to prevent back pain during pregnancy?

To help prevent or ease back pain, be aware of how you stand, sit, and move. Here are some tips that may help:

- Wear low-heeled (but not flat) shoes with good arch support.
- Ask for help when lifting heavy objects.
- When standing for long periods, place one foot on a stool or box.
- If your bed is too soft, have someone help you place a board between the mattress and box spring.
- Do not bend over from the waist to pick things up—squat down, bend your knees, and keep your back straight.
- Sit in chairs with good back support, or use a small pillow behind the low part of your back.
- Try to sleep on your side with one or two pillows between your legs for support.

### What can I do to ease back pain?

Apply heat or cold to the painful area or massage it. Exercises for the back can help lessen backache. They strengthen and stretch muscles that support the back and legs and promote good posture—keeping the muscles of the back, abdomen, hips, and upper body strong. These exercises not only will help ease back pain but also will help prepare you for labor and delivery. Staying active during pregnancy can help with back pain. Water exercise and walking are safe to do during pregnancy and are great for the back.

### When should I contact my health care provider about back pain?

If you have severe pain, or if pain persists for more than 2 weeks, you should contact your health care provider. Do not try to treat yourself. Back pain also can be caused by other problems. Back pain is one of the main symptoms of preterm labor. You also should contact your health care provider if you are having fever, burning during urination, or vaginal bleeding.

**If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.**

**FAQ115:** Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

Copyright August 2011 by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, posted on the Internet, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.