



caring for your back DURING PREGNANCY

Low-back pain is common during pregnancy. Your doctor may have told you that you have low-back or lumbar strain, sciatica, and/or sacroiliac pain. Low back pain usually goes away within 4 to 12 weeks after delivery. The good news is that by taking part in a regular exercise program and improving your posture, you can help ease your low-back pain.

Causes of low-back pain

Low-back pain in pregnancy can be caused by several things:

- The support structures of the back and pelvis relax and loosen as your hormones change.
- Changes in the way you walk, sit, and stand with the growing baby puts a strain on your back.
- As your abdomen grows, the structures that support the low back are stretched and can weaken.

Physical activity

Thirty minutes or more of moderate exercise on most, if not all, days of the week is recommended for normal pregnancies. Activities such as walking, swimming, pool exercises, and riding a stationary bicycle are considered safe aerobic or cardiovascular exercises. Strengthening and stretching exercises are also safe. Any form of exercise should feel good during and after the activity. If your pregnancy is considered high risk or you have other medical conditions, check with your doctor before beginning an exercise program.

Go to kp.org/classes to search for Healthy Living classes like prenatal yoga and other prenatal classes at your local facility. Not connected to the Internet? Visit your local Health Education Center for information.

STRENGTHENING EXERCISE

Kegel exercises can help strengthen your pelvic floor, deep stomach, and back muscles. These muscles work together to help support your back. To strengthen these muscles, tighten or contract the muscles around your vagina and rectum as if to hold in urine and gas; your abdominal muscles should also tighten, drawing in towards your spine. Breathe normally throughout the exercise. Hold for 5 seconds and rest for 10 seconds. Perform 30 repetitions daily in various positions:

- Lying on your side
- Sitting
- On your hands and knees
- Standing

Important note: Avoid exercises on your back after your first trimester.

STRETCHING EXERCISES

All 4s stretch: Start on your hands and knees. Relax your stomach and buttock muscles and let your back sag. Arch your back up toward the ceiling. Hold each position for 5 to 10 seconds, repeat as often as you like. If one direction feels better than the other, repeat the direction that eases your symptoms.



Child's pose: Start in the all 4s position. Move your buttocks back towards your heels. Hold for 5 to 30 seconds. Repeat as often as you like.



Chest stretch: Place the palm side of your forearms in a door frame, stand with one foot forward. Lean forward to stretch your chest. Hold the stretch for 5 to 30 seconds. Repeat as often as you like.



IMPROVING YOUR POSTURE

Position yourself to reduce strain on your back:

- Change positions every 30 minutes.
- Sleep with 1 to 3 pillows or a body pillow between your knees and ankles.



- Sit with support at your low back. Avoid sitting on sofas and chairs that allow your hips to sink lower than your knees.
- While standing:
 - Rest one foot on a small stool or lean against a wall.
 - Cradle your abdomen with your hands while standing.



MORE TIPS TO PROTECT YOUR BACK

- To get into a car, sit down on the seat with both feet on ground. Use your arms to raise each leg into the car.
- Lift only what you can lift comfortably. To lift properly, bend at your hips and knees. If something looks too heavy, it probably is.
- Support your back whenever you change positions by first doing a Kegel and drawing in your abdominals. Please see the *Back Care: Tips for Daily Activities* booklet for more suggestions on moving in ways that protect your back. To get a copy, visit your doctor's home page at kp.org/mydoctor or visit your local Health Education Center.
- A pregnancy support belt can help ease your back. Most women will benefit from an elastic support that helps lift the stomach, which reduces pressure on the low back while standing. Most maternity stores carry back supports for pregnant women.



ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Gain only as much weight as recommended by your doctor.
- Wear supportive, low-heeled shoes rather than flat or high heel shoes.
- Apply a heat or cold pack to your back while lying on your side for 20 minutes to reduce pain. Repeat as often as you like.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Connect to our website at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your pregnancy and your baby's health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.





Consult with your physical therapist or doctor if you experience an increase in your symptoms with recommended exercises, or if you develop new symptoms of numbness, tingling, or a spread of the pain. This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.

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