



Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand
Waitematā

Pelvic pain in pregnancy physiotherapy advice

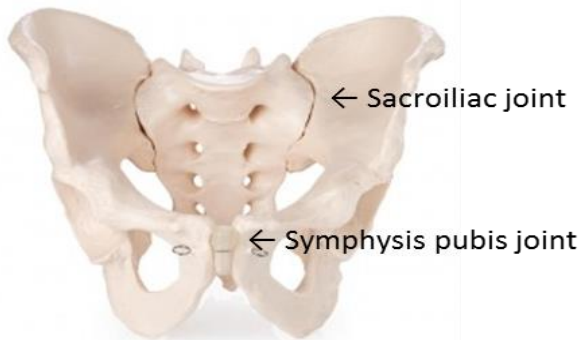
What you need to know

Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP)

PGP is a common problem that happens to one in five women during pregnancy. You may feel a mild or severe pain in your lower back, hips, thighs or pubic bone. Early diagnosis and management can stop symptoms from getting worse and in some cases get rid of the pain. In nearly all women, the pain disappears after giving birth.

What causes PGP?

The pelvis has three joints. Two are at the back on either side of your spine (sacroiliac joints) and one is at the front in the middle (symphysis pubis joint). The joints are held together by muscles and ligaments.



Pregnancy hormones soften the pelvic ligaments to allow your pelvis to stretch to let your baby through.

Any woman can get PGP but some are more at risk. Risk factors include:

- history of lower back and pelvic pain
- previous injury to pelvis
- more than one pregnancy
- hard physical job/workload/poor posture
- increased body weight
- increased mobility of joints in the body.

What can help PGP?

Talk to your midwife. Your midwife can give you a referral to a physiotherapist for specialist help and advice.

Try to avoid situations that put your pelvic joints under additional strain. Do not:

- ✗ stand for long periods (e.g. shopping, housework)
- ✗ lift heavy weights (e.g. toddlers, shopping)
- ✗ sit with your legs crossed or squat
- ✗ twist suddenly or stand with your weight on one leg
- ✗ bend and twist (e.g. vacuuming or cleaning the bath)
- ✗ breast stroke while swimming.

The following will help:

- ✓ sit on a stool or exercise ball instead of standing
- ✓ sit down when putting on your underwear or shoes (flat shoes are best)
- ✓ sleep on your side with a pillow between your knees, and one under your tummy
- ✓ when turning over in bed, turn under instead, onto hands and knees and then lower into the other side
- ✓ side-lying position for sex
- ✓ crawl in and out of bed, instead of swinging your legs out of bed



- ✓ keep your knees together when getting out of a car, use a plastic bag on the seat to help you swivel
- ✓ get in or out of the bath by keeping your knees together and swivel on the edge of the bath
- ✓ lean forward and “push the ground away” when standing
- ✓ walk slowly and take shorter steps
- ✓ go upstairs sideways one step at a time
- ✓ continue to keep active but not if it is too painful. Do not push through the pain
- ✓ use a backpack so your hands are free for support
- ✓ rest and relax when you can and accept help with chores from friends and family
- ✓ hot packs or cold packs over your pelvic joints can help ease the inflammation.

Strengthen the muscle support you have

Your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles provide your pelvis with support and it is important that you strengthen these muscles.



Abdominal strength

Gently tighten your tummy muscles by pulling your belly button towards your spine without using your hands, hold for three seconds and repeat this ten times. Do this three times a day when standing or sitting.

Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles

Pull up your pelvic floor muscles as though you are trying to stop yourself from peeing or farting. Hold for five seconds then relax and repeat ten times. Do this three times a day.

Try to include your pelvic floor exercises in your daily routine (e.g. when you go to bed or brush your teeth). Set a reminder on your phone or download a pelvic floor exercise app.

Some stretches can provide relief

Cat and cow stretch

Start on your hands and knees with a flat back. Arch your back up towards the ceiling and lower your head (cat pose). Sink your tummy towards the floor and raise your head (cow pose). Alternate between these positions a few times.



Child's pose

Start on your hands and knees. Gently sink your bottom down towards your heels and stretch your hands forward. You may need to have your knees slightly apart to allow for your bump, or just take the stretch as far back as your bump will allow and lower down onto your forearms. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds.



Support belts

Pregnancy support belts are designed to support your pelvic joints, lower back and abdominal muscles to reduce pain and discomfort. Talk to your midwife or physiotherapist for advice.

Labour and birth

In labour, use upright positions such as kneeling, standing and all fours. Avoid lying on your back or in a semi-sitting position.

PGP does not tend to affect labour. However, it is important to be aware of your limitations and tell your maternity care provider, or any midwife looking after you, what works for you.



After you have had your baby

Your symptoms will go away as your pregnancy hormones start to decrease. But it can take weeks and in some cases, months – so listen to your body and take things slowly at first.

These are some things you can do to help after you have had your baby:

- ✓ breastfeed sitting upright with your feet on the floor and have a cushion or rolled towel behind your back
- ✓ do not bend down to change baby's nappy, raise baby up to waist height or put baby on the bed and kneel on the floor
- ✓ kneel over the bath rather than bending down
- ✓ do your pelvic floor exercises daily
- ✓ don't be afraid to ask for help from your partner or a family member.



Further information and advice

Talk to your Lead Maternity Carer or General Practitioner.

Contact our Pelvic Health Physiotherapists:

North Shore Hospital: 021 946 119

Waitakere Hospital: 021 846 049

Check out the following websites

Continence Society of NZ:

<https://www.continence.org.nz/>

Pelvic Floor First website with great resources:

<http://www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au/pages/pregnant.html>

Waitematā DHB Maternity Services Information:

<https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/hospitals-clinics/clinics-services/maternity-services/maternity-services/>

Waitematā DHB Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Information:

<https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/allied-health/waitemata-dhb-physiotherapy-pelvic-health/>