



## **Abdominal pain information**

Aches and pains are common in pregnancy, as your body grows, stretches and changes to accommodate your growing baby. Most pain is not harmful, but there are some things that should be checked out. If you have any of the following symptoms, call your healthcare provider straight away:

- Severe pain in your stomach: this can be a sign of several things depending on your gestation, such as miscarriage, or placental abruption; may also be accompanied by vaginal bleeding.
- If the pain is severe and on one side, this can be a sign of ectopic pregnancy, where the fertilised egg has implanted somewhere outside of the uterus. This may also cause pain in your shoulder, or discomfort when urinating or opening your bowels. Unfortunately these pregnancies cannot continue as there is no space to grow, and the embryo will need to be removed medically.
- Regular cramps/ surges/ contractions before 37 weeks: this could be premature labour



- Pain at the top of your bump/under your ribs in the second half of pregnancy, especially if combined with high blood pressure, headaches, visual disturbances such as flashing lights or sudden swelling in hands/face/feet. These can be signs of pre-eclampsia.
- Back pain or lower abdominal pain, along with burning/stinging when urinating, bad smelling or cloudy wee, a raised temperature, or feeling generally unwell: all signs of a urinary tract infection (UTI).

Even in early pregnancy while your foetus is tiny, hormones are affecting your uterus and causing changes which can be uncomfortable. You may have period-type cramps as the embryo is implanting. If these are mild and not accompanied by any bleeding, they are unlikely to be causing a problem.

As your uterus grows, you may experience an occasional sharp pain on one side of your abdomen, this is usually due to the round ligaments which hold your uterus in place stretching and softening. Gentle stretches can help with this pain, and easy movement like walking.

Constipation and trapped wind can also cause abdominal pain. Try to keep moving and stay well hydrated. If you are unable to open your bowels or pass wind for several days, let your GP or midwife know.



Discomfort at the top of your bump and under your ribs is common later on in pregnancy, as the baby grows and there is less space available.

Pelvic girdle pain (PGP), symphysis pubis dysfunction (SPD) and hip pain are all ways of describing discomfort that can affect your pelvis during pregnancy. These problems are more common later on in pregnancy, as the relaxing effects of hormones loosen up the joints of the pelvis, and the weight of your baby and uterus put increasing pressure on your pelvic floor; but they can affect you early on, especially if you have had difficulty in a previous pregnancy. If you are having trouble getting around, speak to your healthcare provider. There are several ways to reduce pain in your pelvis:

- Reduce your activity. If you find that your pain gets worse towards the end of the day, it is likely that overuse and inflammation is affecting your pelvis. Try to build regular rest into your day, ideally taking the time to lie down with pillow support (see below) to really rest your joints.
- Keep moving! On the other hand, it is not good to stay in one position for too long. If you are sat at a desk for many hours, for example, make sure you get up and stretch and move around a few times each hour. Make sure that your chair is properly adjusted for you (your employer should have conducted a pregnancy risk assessment) or use a birth/gym ball to sit on (these are



great as they keep you making tiny movements).

- Try to avoid actions which open your legs wide, like the usual way of getting in and out of a car. If you drive a lot, try putting a plastic bag on the seat, and swinging both legs in together.
- Think about your sleeping arrangements. A firm mattress is usually best for keeping our backs healthy, but in pregnancy can cause discomfort. If your mattress is firm, it may help to lay a duvet or mattress topper on top to pad your hips. Try adding a pillow between your knees, and under your bump. You should be aiming to take any strain off your joints and muscles while you sleep.

Back pain is also very common, for similar reasons as for hip pain above. Try to avoid lifting heavy things, or carrying weight balanced on one side of your body. Flat, supportive shoes will help to distribute weight more evenly too.

The [NHS website](#) has some gentle exercises which can help to strengthen your core muscles, to ease the pressure on your back.