

# You Don't Have To Be Burdened With Back Pain During Pregnancy

(NAPSA)—More than four million women give birth each year in the U.S. An enormous number of changes occur within a woman's body during the nine months of pregnancy. Among them, hormonal changes cause ligament laxity, or a loosening of the ligaments, especially where the spine and pelvis connect. As the weight of the growing baby increases, a women's posture shifts to accommodate her changing body, applying additional pressure to the spine and lower back. It comes as no surprise that a large majority of expectant women will experience some type of back pain.

According to the North American Spine Society (NASS), mothers-to-be need to be aware of the potential risk for prenatal back problems and learn how to avoid unnecessary discomfort or pain. NASS specialists agree that there are generally three types of back pain during pregnancy:

- **Lumbar Pain**—Lumbar pain during pregnancy occurs in the lumbar vertebrae of the lower back, resulting in aching and discomfort. Lumbar pain can radiate to the legs and is aggravated by sitting or standing for long periods of time, or lifting heavy objects including older children.

- **Posterior Pelvic (Sacroiliac) Pain**—This posterior pelvic pain is felt deep inside the buttocks, on one side or both, causing discomfort when the pain-sensitive ligamentous structures are stretched. It is triggered by activities such as walking, climbing stairs, getting in and out of the bathtub or car, or twisting and lifting.

- **Nocturnal Pain**—There are many theories about why night pain develops. One theory is that muscle fatigue accumulates throughout the day and culminates in back pain at night.



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Another is that daylong stress from sacroiliac dysfunction or low-back pain from poor posture produces symptoms in the evening. Circulatory changes during pregnancy may also contribute to low-back pain at night.

What can pregnant women do about this common occurrence? The North American Spine Society offers these tips:

- **Stand up straight.** Pregnant women often slump their shoulders and arch their backs as their bellies grow, putting added pressure on the spine. Good posture can help prevent unnecessary backaches.

- **Exercise:** Moms-to-be need to be conscientious in their exercise programs, paying special attention to abdominal and back-strengthening exercises. Walking, swimming and riding a stationary bicycle are excellent ways to keep fit and take stress off the back.

- **Ask for help.** Many pregnant women try to do too much during the day, which aggravates back pain. Expectant moms should ask for help when carrying and lifting heavy objects. When lifting objects themselves, pregnant women must make sure to bend with their knees to avoid back strain.

- **Wear comfortable shoes and avoid high heels.** As a woman's belly grows and her balance shifts, high heels can throw posture off and increase the chances of stumbling or falling.

- **Sit up straight.** Doctors encourage pregnant women to get up every hour to either walk around the office or step outside for some fresh air. When seated, moms-to-be should keep their feet slightly raised off the floor on a footstool and use a small pillow called a lumbar roll to support the lower back.

- **Get a good night's rest.** Sleeping on the left side with a pillow between the legs, or a "body pillow," helps take pressure off the back. It's also important to take time and always be cautious when getting out of bed.

- **If back pain or discomfort increases,** expectant mothers can consult with their doctor about wearing a special corset that helps support the abdomen and brings the center of gravity back toward the spine.

The North American Spine Society is the nation's leading nonprofit, multidisciplinary medical society dedicated to advancing spine care.

Mothers-to-be interested in improving their spine health can access basic instructions for home exercises on the "For Spine Patients" section of the Web site at [www.spine.org](http://www.spine.org).