

Treatment For Two

PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES TO TREAT EXPECTANT MOTHERS FOR BACK PAIN

When women learn they are expecting a child, their first instinct is to do everything in their power to ensure the baby is born healthy. Routine doctor check-ups and lifestyle modifications are the first steps in having a successful, manageable pregnancy.



Equally important, however, is that the expectant mother considers her own health—not only during the pregnancy but for the future as well. Physical therapists can play a critical role in helping them correct posture pitfalls, to avoid problems such as back & lower extremity pain during pregnancy.

Posture is one of the primary things the assessment is focused on.

"With the hormonal changes that occur, the joints and ligaments become more lax and can lead to postural issues." The Physical therapy exam consists of a full musculoskeletal evaluation, to assess muscle imbalances and to determine which muscles are too tight or have been lengthened. The main goal is to decrease discomfort and or pain.

The most common complaint of pregnant women is lower back pain, a condition that typically begins showing symptoms in the third or fourth month of pregnancy. The hormonal changes during pregnancy increase the elasticity of soft tissue, which typically stabilizes the pelvis. Such changes are necessary to allow the baby to slide through the birth canal during the birthing process. These changes place stress on the other parts of the body to maintain correct posture. Add to that the increasing weight of the child, and you have an inordinate amount of stress placed on the lower back.

Avoiding Problems

Due to widespread presence of lower back pain in pregnant women, rather than treating patients when they begin to experience problems, physical therapists prefer to nip them in the bud.

It's very similar to anyone with back pain, protecting the lower back is common to all people, whether a pregnant woman or a 50-year-old man. Attention to correct biomechanics during physical activity is key. As important as exercise is, some forms of exercise are discouraged, such as heavy lifting, which places stress on the abdominal muscles as well as the lower back. When lifting is absolutely necessary, women should draw the power from their legs instead of the lower back to avoid hyperextension. It is also recommended that women sleep with a pillow between the knees to relieve pressure on the spine.

Postural problems are slightly more common in women who have had children in the past rather than first-time mothers. It is especially predominant with those who have 2 or more children

in short amount of time and may not have regained proper muscle control from the initial pregnancy. Additionally, women who deliver via Caesarean section can have the abdominal muscles compromised, leading to postural issues.

Aquatic exercise is an excellent option for pregnant women. Obviously, with the reduction of weight while in the water, women can exercise without the added stress on their joints. Women can work on strengthening, stabilization and decreasing pain while in water.

Finally, if postural control does not correct back pain and additional support is needed, the physical therapist can recommend an orthotic support for the lower back or abdomen. This can help correct incorrect alignment and ease the strain on the muscles impacted by the laxity caused by hormonal changes.

Fortunately, once the baby is born, the pain often ceases. But in those cases where discomfort persists, it is recommended that women continue the exercise program they used during pregnancy to re-establish muscle control.