

# PHYSICAL THERAPY

AT BRIARCLIFF & JEFFERSON VALLEY, P.C.

## Physical Therapy – Treatment and Prevention of Pregnancy Related Conditions

There are many physiological changes of pregnancy that impact a woman's health before and after the baby is born.



Physical preparation is emphasized through medical care and childbirth classes but restoration of the woman's health and comfort is sometimes overlooked as the attention becomes focused on the baby.

Women differ greatly in their adaptation to the childbearing year. There is a wide spectrum of women that physical therapists see.

One end of the spectrum consists of women running races at 3<sup>rd</sup> months pregnant, and then able to bicycle when they are at 2 weeks post-partum. The other end of the spectrum is a woman who slumps as she nurses her 2 month old and reports back, elbow and wrist pain and occasional urinary incontinence. Obviously this woman requires more assistance with her physical restoration.

It is the role of the physical therapist to provide education and treatment to alleviate these problems which may start pre-natally but are more common post-natally, including after a C- section.

A physical therapist treats the following conditions:

- Diastasis recti
- Pelvic floor dysfunction
- Low back pain

- Sacroiliac joint pain
- Faulty posture

**Diastasis recti-** This is defined as a separation of the 2 halves of the abdominal muscle along the seam which runs down the middle of the abdomen. A separation of two fingers width is considered a problem pre-natally or after 1 week post-natally. The name "diastasis" - means separation; "recti"- the abdominal muscle.

Because of the zipper design, the middle, when stretched, can separate at its weakest point; adults may also develop hernias here. Women who develop a separation usually do not have abdominal discomfort" but usually have a chronic backache. This usually happens in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester, and is more common with twins and triplets or in someone who is obese. A primary cause is thought to be the hormonal changes in pregnancy including an increase of the hormone relaxin, which softens the midline seam, making separation more likely during pregnancy than at other times.

**Pelvic floor dysfunction -** In situations of abdominal muscle weakness there can be a downward movement of internal organs and pelvic floor relaxation. The muscles of the pelvic floor are crucial to a childbearing

women's present and future health but are not well understood. They lie between your legs and form the base of support for the pelvic organs. Pelvic floor dysfunction patients can experience pain or difficulty with bladder control. There are exercises which can strengthen the pelvic floor.

**Low back pain and faulty posture** - are also common in pregnancy. Many women suffer sciatica. There is a shift in the center of gravity and the fetus puts stress on the muscles of the lower back.

There are many successful exercise programs which can assist women with pregnancy related disorders. Please contact us for more information.

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