



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



Managing Pregnancy - related Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP)

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What is Pelvic Girdle Pain?

Pregnancy-related Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP), formerly known as Symphysis Pubis Dysfunction (SPD) is a condition that affects approximately 1 in 4 women during pregnancy.

Women experience different symptoms and these are more severe in some women than others.

This booklet is designed to provide you with useful advice, practical tips, and exercises to help you manage your pain effectively.

The symptoms of PGP are often felt over the pubic bone at the front, along your groin, below your tummy, in your hip(s) and/or across one or both sides of your lower back or buttocks. Some women experience pain in all or just one of the above regions mentioned.

You may have difficulty with:

- Walking
- Taking weight on one leg at a time e.g. climbing stairs,
- dressing, getting in/out of bath
- Parting your legs e.g. In / Out of Car
- With hip movements e.g. Turning in bed
- Lying on your back or side
- With normal activities of daily life

What causes PGP?

It may be a combination of factors.

We rely on strong ligaments and muscles to balance our pelvis and hips for stability.

Ligaments around your pelvis can have increased laxity due to your pregnancy hormones. This can lead to increased or uneven movement happening in the pelvis. This extra movement in itself can cause pain.

The Pelvis



Ligaments



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As your baby grows, your posture changes. This leads to a change in the activity of the muscles of your tummy, pelvic girdle, hips and pelvic floor. This can increase the strain on your lower back and pelvis.

Because there is increased movement in the joints of your pelvis and the muscle activity has changed this can cause mal-alignment of the pelvic girdle joints. This can be a source of pain and discomfort.

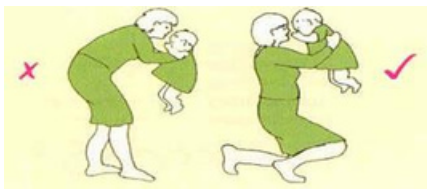
If you have a history of back pain your symptoms may worsen in pregnancy.

Occasionally women experience pain due to the position of their baby.

Tips for preventing or managing PGP:

Daily activities

- Pace your daily activities, you may need to rest more often than you are used to. You may find it difficult to stand for long periods.
- Be as active as possible within your pain limits and avoid activities that make the pain worse.
- Avoid heavy housework such as Hoovering.
- You may find it easier to sit when doing some house work such as ironing or preparing vegetables.
- Take care when pushing a heavy shopping trolley.
- Avoid turning quickly or twisting as this can strain your pelvis.
- Always maintain equal weight through both feet e.g. avoid standing on one leg i.e. sit when getting dressed /undressed.
- Wear comfortable supportive shoes, avoid high heels.
- If you find climbing the stairs difficult or painful, go one step at a time.
- When going upstairs try leading with the less painful leg. Going downstairs, try leading with the more painful leg and use the banister for support.
- Take care with lifting heavy objects or small children. When lifting bend your knees and keep your back straight or kneel on to one knee to lift or get to a lower height. Try to minimize the amount of lifting that you do and avoid stooping over.

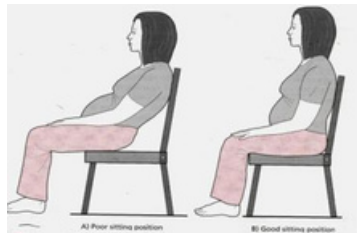


- Sit down or kneel to comfort small children. Let them climb up to you instead of lifting.
- Let small children climb into the car seat themselves if they can.
- Ask for or accept help with your daily work.

Sitting



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Slouching or sitting very straight can put strain on your back and pelvis. Aim for halfway between these two positions.

Placing a small support such as a cushion or rolled up towel at your lower back can help you to avoid slouching.

Sit well back into the chair and take its full support. Don't perch on the edge as your muscles will tire more quickly.

If using a computer bring your chair under the desk and/or the keyboard closer so your arms can rest by your side as you type.

Adjust the monitor so it is at eye level.



When driving, adjust your seat such that your shoulders can remain in a relaxed position. This may include adjusting the height of the seat or the distance from the pedals. This can help to prevent strain on your back

To get out of the car slide your seat back to create more space.

Move your feet slowly, one at a time towards the door and then step them out one at a time. Lean forward to stand up. You can use the handle over your door for support.

Sleeping

A comfortable position may be lying on your side with a pillow between your knees.



As your pregnancy progresses you may find placing an additional pillow/rolled up towel under your bump will help support the bump, placing less strain on your hips and lower back.



If you find your hips are sore or aching this may be because your mattress is very firm. To help relieve the pain, double over a single duvet and place it underneath you.

Moving in Bed

- When turning in bed, bend your knees up, pull in your tummy muscles and keep your knees together. Turn, moving your shoulder and hip together in one movement.
- To get out of bed, roll onto your side. Drop your legs over the edge of the bed. Use your elbow and hands to push your body into a sitting position.
- When you want to get into bed reverse this procedure.



Exercises:

All of these exercises should feel comfortable to do, they should not be painful. For all the stretches aim to hold them for 5-10 seconds and repeat 4-5 times.

If you are experiencing discomfort, go more gently with the exercises, do not stretch as far and do not hold the stretch for as long.

Pelvic Tilting – This is a good way to stretch your lower back and pelvis especially if you get a lot of low back pain or stiffness. It is a nice warm up exercise to do before you commence some of the other exercises. Sitting on a chair, sit as tall as you can, emphasising the curve in your lower back. Then slouch as much as you can, rolling back onto your tailbone. You can also do this exercise on a gym ball.





Pelvic circles



This is a lovely exercise to increase flexibility around your hips and pelvis. Sitting on the gym ball circle the ball underneath you in one direction, then swap and change direction. Keep the movement small to start with and increase by small amounts as you feel comfortable.

Inner Thigh stretch



This will help maintain hip movement which will help during delivery. It is also a nice stretch for those inner thigh muscles which often get tight during pregnancy and cause pubic pain. Sit on the edge of a bed or chair. Walk your feet apart as far as you can comfortably. Keeping your legs relaxed, use your hands on the inside of your knees to push your knees gently apart. You should feel a comfortable stretch in your inner thigh muscles.

Cat stretch – This is helpful to stretch the middle part of your back. Rest on all 4's on the floor or your bed. Round

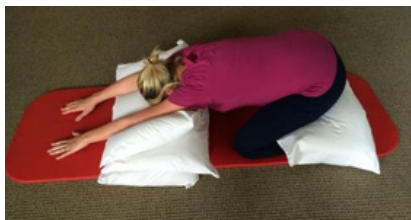
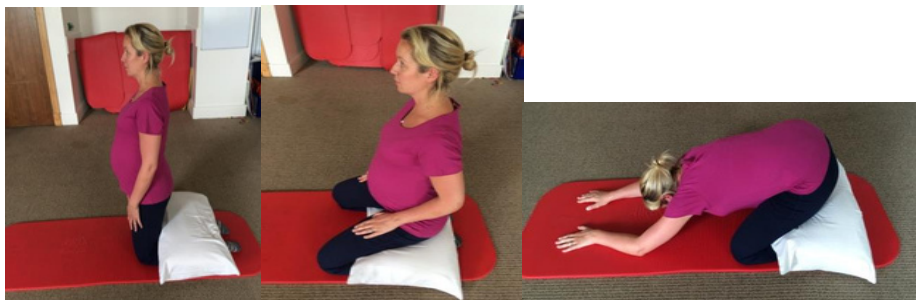
your shoulders and stretch the middle part of your back up towards the ceiling.



Childs Pose stretch

This can be helpful to relieve low back, pelvis and buttock pain. Kneel back onto your heels on the floor or on your bed. Using a pillow behind your knees can make it more comfortable. Widen your knees to allow space for your bump.

Keeping your bum on your heels stretch your hands forward as far as you can comfortably.



If you find this difficult you can use pillows to lean on.



Side stretch

Using the child's pose stretch as above you can stretch either of your sides. This can be helpful if you have back/pelvis/groin pain on one side. Rest into the child's pose stretch as above. To stretch your right side reach your right hand over your left arm. Change sides to stretch the left side

Child's Pose with Gym Ball

Place your hands on the gym ball and slowly move the gym ball forwards to stretch your back and shoulders, to the right side to stretch the left side of your back, stretch towards the left side to stretch the right side of your back



Alternatively you can sit and stretch your sides while sitting. To stretch your left side, raise your left arm overhead and reach it towards the right side. Take a slow, deep breath in to enhance the stretch and breathe out as you return to your arm.

Lower tummy exercise -Your tummy muscles help lift and support the weight of your baby. This can reduce the strain on your back and pelvis.



You can feel these muscles working by placing your hands on your lower tummy, below your belly button. Breathe in normally and as you breathe out gently pull your tummy muscles in, away from your hands. Try to keep the muscles working for a count of 10 seconds. It is important that you keep breathing.

Self Care:

Heat

Along with doing the above exercises, you can play an active role in managing your pain by applying heat to the areas that are tender i.e. lower back and hip/buttocks.

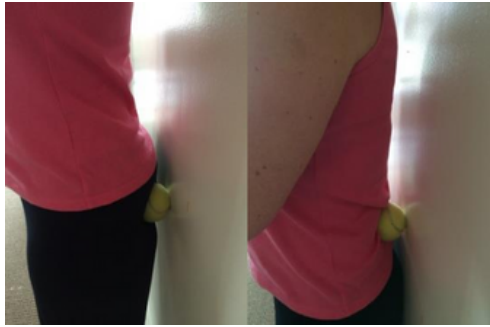
Heat can be in the form of a hotpack, hotwater bottle, hot shower or bath. It is easy to overheat in pregnancy therefore, please ensure the room is well ventilated and have a glass of water nearby if having a bath.

****You are advised not to use heat in the first trimester.****

Be cautious when using a hotpack. Ensure it is wrapped in a towel and leave it on for a maximum of 20 minutes. Ensure it feels comfortable and soothing as there is a risk of burning your skin if it is too hot.

Pressure Point Release/Massage

As mentioned, certain muscles begin to work harder in pregnancy to compensate for the changes in posture. These muscles develop tight knots which can refer pain down your thigh, lower back and to the front. You can use a tennis ball or spiky massage ball to ease these tight muscles as shown below.



Place the tennis ball against your buttock or lower back area (not over the spine). Try to find a tender point in the muscle using the ball. Once you have found it, use your body to push the tennis ball against the wall and maintain the pressure on the sore point. The pressure on the sore point will cause the knot to relax and release. Keep the pressure on until the pain eases, it can sometimes take 30 seconds or so. Move the ball to the next painful area in the muscle and repeat above. It is important to release both sides.

Staying fit when you have PGP

It is important to stay fit during pregnancy as it has been proven to help prevent Gestational Diabetes and can help shorten the second stage of labour. However, when you are experiencing pelvic girdle pain it can be difficult to know what type of exercise is best.

Walking- If you experience pain when walking or you notice you are sore a few hours after going for a walk then listen to your body and limit your walking to what is necessary. If walking isn't sore then stay within your comfort zone and adapt it as the pregnancy progresses.

Running/ High impact exercise- If you have PGP you should not be running or doing any high impact exercise.

Swimming- Can help you manage your PGP and stay fit during your pregnancy. Strokes such as backstroke or front crawl or even gentle walking in the water can all help you

manage your PGP and stay fit.

Do not do the breaststroke as the frog kick can aggravate PGP or lead to you developing symptoms of PGP.

Pregnancy yoga- This can help you manage your pain. You may find the relaxation and breathing exercises beneficial during your labour.

Pregnancy Pilates-This can help improve your posture and help maintain core stability.

***If attending any of the classes above it is important to inform the instructor that you are experiencing PGP.**

Preparing for Delivery

There are many things you can do in the last few weeks and months of your pregnancy. You may find it beneficial to refer to the following website; www.spinningbabies.com. There are some techniques which you and your partner might like to try from 18-20 weeks onwards.

Positioning for Labour

The majority of women with PGP cope very well with a vaginal birth.

First Stage of Labour

This is the period of time from when labour begins until your cervix is fully dilated.

Being upright either standing, walking or sitting uses gravity to encourage your baby's head to engage into the pelvis.

It is beneficial to have an active labour for as long as you can.

However if the distance you walk is very limited due to pain or you require the aid of crutches to walk for example: you could maintain

an upright position by sitting on the gym ball or use the CUB. You could also sit on a chair or lean forward resting on a bed.

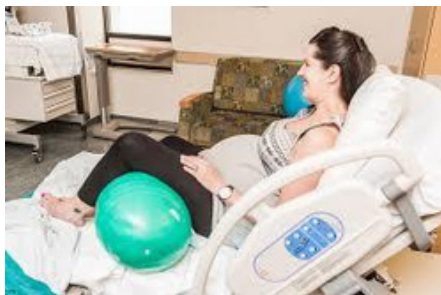


- Movement of your pelvis also encourages this. Walking, rocking on a gym ball or swaying your hips standing are all ways of getting your pelvis moving.
- If you are experiencing a lot of low back pain or tailbone pain, kneeling on all fours can take your baby's weight away from your back.
- It is also a nice position if you are experiencing severe pubic pain and find keeping your legs apart uncomfortable.





You may find it comfortable to use a peanut ball to support you in certain positions during labour. This can also be beneficial to help progress labour if you have an epidural. (Please refer to photos below).



Second stage of labour

This is the period of time when you start pushing until your baby is born.

Kneeling on all fours or in a forward lean position can be a comfortable position for pushing. The back of the bed can be positioned upright to allow you to lean against it when pushing.



Side-lying with your least painful leg supported on pillows, foot rest or a peanut ball is a comfortable position for pushing. This is particularly useful if you have received an epidural.



You can also use the peanut ball in sidelying to support your leg.



Useful websites:

- Pelvic Partnership: www.pelvicpartnership.org.uk
- Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Women's Health - www.acpwh.co.uk
- Spinning Babies- www.spinningbabies.com

Acknowledgments:

ACPWH (2007) Pregnancy related pelvic girdle pain