

# Pelvic girdle pain

Education and advice



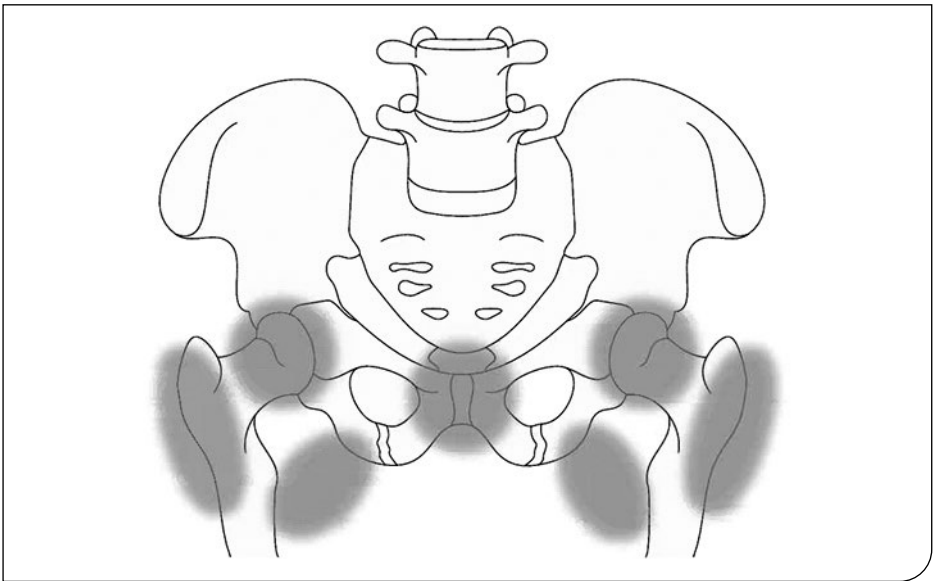
This patient information leaflet uses the terms woman and birthing person, women and birthing people and mother throughout. These terms should be taken to include all pregnant or postpartum people. Similarly, where the term parent(s) is used, this should be taken to include anyone who has main responsibility for caring for a baby.

## Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet has been designed for patients who have pelvic, back and hip pain related to their pregnancy. It gives you information about ways to manage and reduce your pain.

## What is Pelvic Girdle Pain?

Pelvic girdle pain, also known as PGP, is a general term for pain between the waist and the buttocks. You may also feel pain down the back of the leg towards the knee or into the groin area. PGP was previously known as symphysis pubis dysfunction, or SPD.



PGP is thought to develop due to a combination of muscle imbalance, hormonal changes and changes in posture or the way you sit and stand. Up to 7 in 10 women will experience some level of lower back or pelvic pain in pregnancy. 2 in 10 will be diagnosed with PGP.

### **Common symptoms of PGP include:**

- pain while walking and sitting
- difficulty climbing the stairs
- pain and difficulty getting in and out of bed as well as rolling over in bed
- having to sit down to get dressed.

### **Some people are more at risk from PGP than others.**

#### **Risk factors include:**

- already having weakness around the pelvis or lower back
- a history of lower back or pelvic pain
- injuries to the pelvis
- hypermobility
- increased weight during or at the end of your pregnancy
- PGP in a previous pregnancy.

## **How can I manage my PGP?**

You can relieve and manage your PGP during pregnancy with appropriate advice and exercises. Most women will see their symptoms get better within the first four weeks after delivery.

# How to manage the symptoms of PGP

## 1. Modify your activities

There are a number of simple changes you can try out in order to relieve your pain.

### **Getting dressed**

- Put your trousers, socks and underwear on while sitting down.

### **Going upstairs**

- Go upstairs and downstairs one leg at a time. If you have one leg which is more comfortable than the other, use this leg first as you go up. When you come down, lead with the less comfortable leg.

### **Getting into or out of a car**

- Try placing two plastic bags on the seat. These will help your body to turn on the seat more easily. Slowly lower yourself down onto the seat. Either bring one leg into the car at a time or slowly swivel. Remove the plastic bags before starting your journey. Reverse these instructions to get back out.

### **Getting into bed**

- Stand by the side of the bed, facing the pillow. Place both hands on the mattress and crawl onto the bed. Keep your knees close together. When you are on the bed, slowly lower yourself onto your elbow and hip on one side. Continue down so that you are lying on your side.
- Sit down on the edge of the bed. Swivel your body and bring both legs up onto the edge of the bed. You can use your hands to help this movement. Then lower yourself onto your elbow and finally onto your side.

## **Rolling in bed**

- Keep your knees together and slowly roll them towards the direction you want to face. Reach the arm you are not lying on over to help your upper body turn towards this same direction.
- From lying on your side, push up onto your elbows to lift your upper body. Slowly turn to face the mattress and rise onto your hands and knees. Then take the arm you now want to be lying on underneath yourself and lower gently back onto the bed. You should now be lying on the opposite side.

## **Walking**

- Take shorter steps and walk at a slower pace. Allow plenty of time to get to your destination so you can have a rest or sit down along the way if needed.

## **Sitting**

- Avoid crossing your legs or sitting in an unsupported chair. Place a pillow or rolled towel behind your back and a foot rest under your feet. This will redistribute your weight slightly and help to relieve the pressure through the lower back and pelvis.

## **Standing from sitting**

- Shuffle your buttocks towards the edge of the chair, and then bend your knees so your feet are slightly underneath them. Lean your chest forwards and place your hands on your knees. Then push through your legs up into standing. Reverse this movement in order to sit back down again. Use your arms and legs to support your weight.

## **Sleeping**

- We suggest sleeping on your side with a pillow underneath your head, underneath your bump and between your knees.

## **Sexual intercourse**

- Try a variety of positions to see which is most comfortable. This could include lying on your side or kneeling on all fours.

## **2. Pace yourself**

- Pay attention to the level of activity of different tasks that you can manage without making your pain worse. This is your baseline.
- Spread activity throughout the day.
- Aim to stay at your baseline or slowly increase it to keep pain under control.

## **3. Posture**

- Your posture or the way you stand and sit changes in pregnancy in order to allow for your growing uterus. This changes the angle of the pelvis, which can increase the strain on your lower back and pelvis.
- Aim to stand and sit with your pelvis in a neutral position. You can find this by tilting your pelvis forward and back as far as is comfortable. The middle point between the two extremes is your neutral.
- Perform this pelvic tilting exercise regularly throughout the day. This can help prevent stiffness and muscle tightness developing.

## **4. Support**

- Our pain can be impacted by our thoughts, beliefs and life stressors. You might want to speak to a close relative, friend or medical provider to support you in finding ways to reduce your stress and worries, to help you to manage your pain. It's important to have a good support system to help you to navigate the changes and challenges that pregnancy can bring.

## **5. Pain relief**

- In pregnancy, options for pain relief can feel limited. Heat and/or ice can be beneficial pain relief options - apply a heat pack, hot water bottle or ice pack to the painful area. Apply for 10 to 15 minutes at a time, being careful not to apply this directly over your bump. You should feel a pleasant warming or cooling of the area but this should not feel like a burning or numbing sensation. We would advise always placing heat or ice packs over clothing, or placing a tea towel between your skin and the heat or ice.
- If you are continuing to struggle with managing your pain, we would advise that you speak with your GP or midwife regarding medication options.



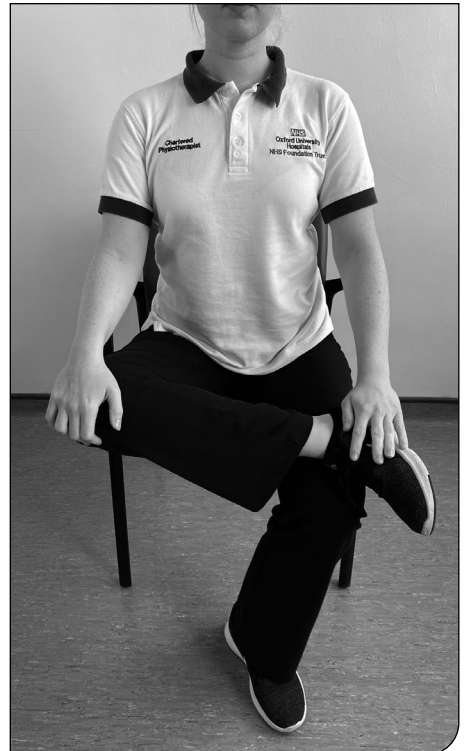
## 6. Stretches:

- You may experience muscle soreness or tightness during pregnancy due to changes in posture, an increase in weight or an old injury.
- Hold each stretch for 15 to 20 seconds. Aim to do these regularly throughout the day.

*Stretches should not cause you pain. If they do, try a more gentle version of what has been suggested. Not every exercise will be right for you. If any of these stretches make your symptoms worse, please stop.*

### **Piriformis stretch**

- Sit on a chair and place one foot onto the opposite knee.
- Then lean forward.
- You should feel a stretch in the buttock and outer thigh of the leg you have raised.



## Hip flexor stretch

- Stand with one leg in front of the other and both feet facing forwards.
- Hold the back of a chair or table to help you balance.
- Lift the heel of your back foot slightly, then bend your front knee and lean forwards.
- You should feel a stretch in the hip and thigh of your back leg.
- Repeat this with the other leg in front.



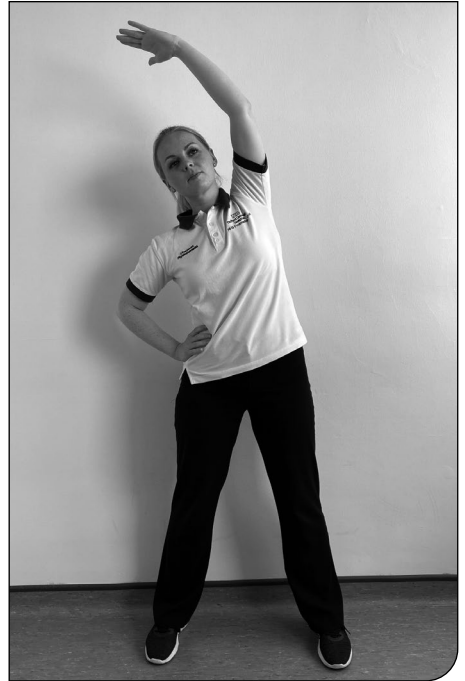
## Hip adductor stretch

- Hold the back of a chair or table to help you balance.
- Start with your feet wider than hip width apart.
- Take your weight over to one side allowing the knee to bend.
- Keep the other leg straight to feel a stretch in the inner thigh.



## Side stretch

- This exercise can be done while standing or sitting.
- Face forward and reach your right arm up and over your head and lean to the left.
- You should feel the stretch down the right side of your body.
- Straighten up again and repeat the exercise with the other arm.



## Upper back stretch

- This exercise can be done while standing or sitting.
- Put your hands together in front of you and then straighten your arms out forwards.
- You should feel the stretch in your upper back and shoulders.
- Gently lower your chin to increase the stretch.



## Chest stretch

- This exercise can be done while standing or sitting.
- Put your hands together behind you and push them down towards the floor.
- You should feel a stretch across your chest.



## Spinal stretch

- On your hands and knees, round your spine to the ceiling.
- Tuck your chin to your chest and tuck your tailbone under.
- Feel the stretch down the length of your back.
- Then reverse this movement arching your back.
- Lift your chin and tailbone away from one another and towards the ceiling in opposite directions.



## 7. Strengthening:

### Deep tummy muscles:

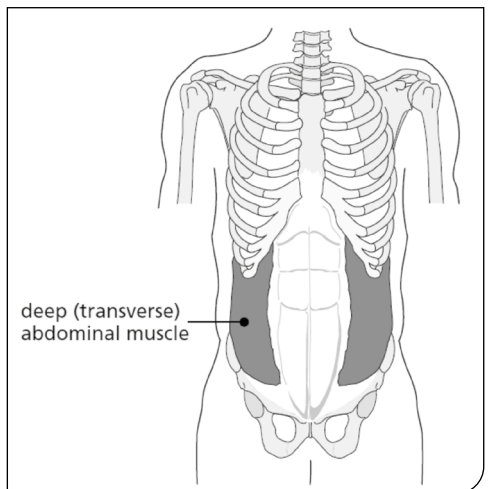
During pregnancy the muscles in your tummy become weaker as they stretch to allow your baby to grow. This means that the support they give your back, abdomen and pelvis may change.

Your deep tummy muscles wrap around your tummy at the front. It is very important to make sure these muscles are strong because they support your back and pelvic joints when you move.

### How to strengthen your deep tummy muscles

1. Lie down on your side and breathe normally.
2. Draw in your lower tummy, the area just below your belly button, towards your spine.
3. You should not hold your breath or suck your whole tummy in. Your rib cage and shoulders should stay still. The correct movement is very small and should only involve your lower tummy.
4. Try to hold this contraction for up to 10 seconds and then relax completely.
5. Repeat this up to 10 times. Remember to breathe smoothly throughout.

Once you can do this while lying down, try it while sitting, standing or on hands and knees. Tightening your lower tummy muscles can also help you when lifting and carrying objects because it supports your lower back and pelvis.



## **Pelvic floor muscles:**

Your pelvic floor muscles are a sling that runs from your tailbone at the back to your pubic bone at the front. They support your uterus, bladder and bowel from underneath and help maintain bladder and bowel control. During pregnancy these muscles can become weak. As a result, half of women have difficulty controlling their bladder and bowels during pregnancy.

## **How to train your pelvic floor muscles:**

1. Find a comfortable position. For example, lying down on your side or sitting.
2. Gently tighten your pelvic floor muscles. To do this, imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind by tightening around your back passage. At the same time, imagine trying to stop yourself passing urine by tightening the muscles around your front passage.
3. Keep breathing normally.

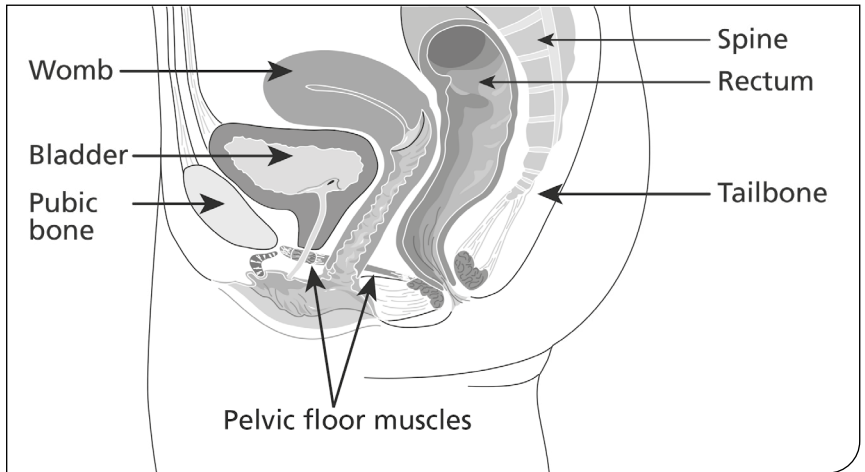
## **Slow:**

- Aim to hold the tightening for up to 10 seconds. Don't worry if you can't hold for this long to start with.
- Fully relax the muscles and then rest for 4 seconds .
- Repeat this up to 10 times.
- Remember to keep breathing throughout. Don't hold your breath.

## **Fast:**

- Next, repeat the tightening's quickly. Hold for 1 second each time then relax completely. Repeat this up to 10 times.

Once you can do these exercises while lying and sitting, try them in a standing position.



There is an NHS app called 'Squeezy' which you can download on your phone or tablet to help keep on top of your pelvic floor exercises.



You can find more information of how to develop a pelvic floor exercise program via our information video using the following link: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdN2gQX2280](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdN2gQX2280)

## 8. Labour and birth

- Despite experiencing pelvic pain, many women can still have a normal vaginal birth.
- We would recommend planning ahead, and talking to your birthing partner and midwife. In your birth plan, it might be helpful to write that you have PGP and how this affects you, so that the people supporting you throughout labour and birth are aware of your condition.
- Think about positions that are comfortable for you and write these in your birth plan too, so that you can be supported to use them during labour and delivery.
- Many women find that being in water is comfortable as it can take the weight off your joints and allow you to keep moving, so you might want to consider a water birth. We would advise that you discuss this with your midwife.



## Contact us

If you are struggling to manage your pelvic girdle pain and feel that you need further support, you should reach out to your midwife, health visitor, GP. Alternatively you can contact the Women's Health Physiotherapy department via telephone.

Telephone: 01865 235 383

Weekdays between 8am and 4pm  
(or leave a message on our answerphone).

Email: [physio.womensandmenshealth@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:physio.womensandmenshealth@ouh.nhs.uk)

## Other sources of information

### **OUH Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy Website:**

[www.ouh.nhs.uk/services/departments/therapies/therapy-rehabilitation/women-and-men.aspx](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/services/departments/therapies/therapy-rehabilitation/women-and-men.aspx)

### **Ouhnhs Youtube Channel:**

Pelvic Girdle Pain – search for  
“Pelvic Girdle Pain Advice Class”

Pelvic floor exercises – search for:  
“The Pelvic Floor – Developing an Exercise Program”

### **POGP Pelvic Girdle Pain:**

[https://thepogp.co.uk/userfiles/pages/files/resources/23xxxpogppelvic\\_girdle\\_pain\\_final.pdf](https://thepogp.co.uk/userfiles/pages/files/resources/23xxxpogppelvic_girdle_pain_final.pdf)





## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy Team  
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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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