

12 Ways to Relieve Back Pain During Pregnancy



Back pain during pregnancy is extremely common — it affects roughly [40% of pregnant women](#) at some point, according to the Cleveland Clinic. Pain can be localized to the lower back or radiate into the buttocks, thighs, and legs, sometimes causing sciatica-like symptoms.

The discomfort may be constant, worsen with activity, disrupt sleep, or limit daily movement. Most pregnancy-related back pain resolves after delivery, though for some women it can persist longer. Women with a history of back problems are generally at higher risk of experiencing back pain during pregnancy.

This guide explains why back pain happens during pregnancy and walks through 12 practical, doctor-backed ways to manage it — plus the warning signs that mean it's time to call your provider.

What Causes Back Pain During Pregnancy?



Back pain typically starts between the **fifth and seventh month** of pregnancy, though a smaller number of women notice it as early as **4 to 16 weeks**. Several physical changes contribute to it:

Hormonal changes. During pregnancy, the body releases higher levels of a hormone called **relaxin**, which loosens the ligaments in the pelvis to prepare for delivery. [According to Mayo Clinic](#), this same loosening effect isn't limited to the pelvis — it can affect ligaments throughout the body, including the ones supporting the spine, which is part of why some women notice back pain even in the first trimester.

A shifting center of gravity. As the belly grows, the body's center of gravity moves forward. Many women compensate by leaning backward, which strains the lower back muscles over time and changes how they sit, stand, and sleep.

Added weight. The spine has to support the growing weight of the pregnancy, straining muscles that are already working harder than usual.

Posture and lumbar curvature. The **lumbar spine** develops a more pronounced inward curve, adding pressure to the joints, muscles, ligaments, and discs of the back. The **psoas muscle**, which stabilizes the spine and supports hip and leg movement, can shorten in response — which tends to make symptoms worse.

Stress. Stress increases muscle tension, especially in areas of the body that are already under strain.

Women who are overweight or who had back pain before pregnancy are at **higher risk**, according to [ACOG](#).

What Does Pregnancy Back Pain Feel Like?

Pregnancy-related back pain generally falls into two overlapping types, and many women experience a mix of both:

Lumbar (lower back) pain is felt at and above the waist, centered in the middle of the back. It may occur on its own or radiate down into the leg or foot — a pattern known as **sciatica**. This type tends to worsen with prolonged sitting or standing.

Posterior pelvic pain is felt deeper, below the waistline — on one or both sides, or across the tailbone. Clinically, this type is often reported **more frequently** than lumbar pain alone during pregnancy, and it tends to flare up with activities like climbing stairs, turning over in bed, or standing on one leg.

Because the two types can overlap and respond to different management strategies, it's worth mentioning to your provider exactly where and when the pain occurs — this helps them recommend the most effective relief options for your specific case.

How Is Pregnancy Back Pain Diagnosed?

Your provider will typically diagnose pregnancy-related back pain based on your **medical history** and a **physical examination**. If more information is needed, **ultrasound** and **MRI** are generally the preferred imaging options during pregnancy, since neither is associated with known risk to the fetus.

X-ray and CT scans use ionizing radiation and are typically **avoided when possible** — but according to [ACOG](#), they **shouldn't be withheld** if your provider determines one is genuinely necessary for an accurate diagnosis, since the radiation dose involved is typically far below the level associated with fetal harm. If imaging is recommended, it's reasonable to ask your provider why that specific test was chosen and whether MRI could serve as an alternative.

12 Ways to Relieve Back Pain During Pregnancy

1. Be mindful of your sitting position



Sitting puts more sustained pressure on the spine than almost any other position. At home and at work, choose chairs with a **straight back, defined armrests**, and **firm, supportive cushioning** — a well-designed [seat cushion](#) can help if your chair doesn't offer enough support on its own. Use a **footrest** to elevate your feet, and avoid crossing your legs, which tilts the pelvis forward and adds stress to supporting muscles.

2. Take regular breaks to move

Walk, stand, or do light stretches **at least once an hour**. Staying in one position — sitting or standing — for too long tends to make back pain worse. If your job requires standing, resting one foot on a low stool periodically helps take pressure off the lower back, according to [ACOG](#).

3. Lift correctly

If you need to lift something, **bend at the knees** rather than the waist, keep your back straight, and use your leg muscles — not your back — to do the lifting. Keep the object close to your body as you stand.

4. Manage your weight gain

Extra weight beyond what's recommended for your pregnancy adds extra pressure to the joints and spine. Talk to your provider about a **healthy weight gain range** for your body and stage of pregnancy.

5. Choose supportive shoes

Low, supportive heels (around 5 cm) tend to work better than high heels or completely flat shoes, which can affect posture and balance.

6. Avoid overreaching

Use a stable, low step stool to reach items on high shelves instead of stretching or overextending your back.

7. Manage stress

Since stress increases muscle tension, calming activities can genuinely help reduce pain. **Prenatal yoga** is a popular option that combines gentle movement with relaxation.

8. Stay active with pregnancy-safe exercise

Walking, swimming, cycling, and prenatal physical therapy are all generally considered safe, typically for **20 to 45 minutes**, three to five days a week. Avoid exercising to the point of exhaustion, and check with your provider before starting any new routine.

9. Strengthen your abdominal and pelvic muscles



Pelvic floor exercises support the back as well as the pelvis. Gently rocking forward and backward while seated on an exercise ball is another low-impact way to engage these muscles.

10. Use hot and cold therapy

Alternate **cold and hot compresses** in roughly 15-minute intervals to ease muscle soreness. A warm shower directed at your back can also work like a gentle massage.

11. Consider a prenatal massage

A massage therapist trained in **prenatal massage** (typically recommended after the first trimester) can help relieve muscle tension safely.

12. Wear supportive maternity wear

Certain maternity products are specifically designed to ease back strain, including:

- Maternity belly bands

- Abdominal support belts
- Pregnancy support garments
- Maternity support clothing

If you found these tips helpful, you may also want to read our guide on [Traveling by Car During Pregnancy: 5 Expert Recommendations](#) for tips on managing discomfort during long car rides.

5 Safe Stretches and Exercises for Pregnancy Back Pain

Always check with your doctor before starting a new exercise routine during pregnancy, and stop immediately if any movement causes pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath.

Cat-Cow Stretch

Get on your hands and knees with your wrists under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. As you inhale, drop your belly and lift your head and tailbone slightly (Cow). As you exhale, round your spine toward the ceiling and tuck your chin (Cat). According to [Mayo Clinic](#), this gentle low-back stretch can genuinely help ease pregnancy back pain. Move slowly between the two positions for **8 to 10 repetitions**.

Gentle Spinal Rotation

Sit tall in a sturdy chair with your feet flat on the floor. Place one hand on the opposite knee and gently twist your torso toward the back of the chair, holding for a few seconds before returning to center. Repeat on both sides, keeping the movement slow and controlled — never force the rotation.

Side Stretches

Sit or stand tall, raise one arm overhead, and lean gently toward the opposite side until you feel a light stretch along your torso. Hold for **15 to 20 seconds**, then switch sides.

Pelvic Tilt (Shell Exercise)

Lie on your side or sit on an exercise ball. Gently tilt your pelvis forward and backward in a slow, controlled motion to engage your lower abdominal muscles without straining your back. This is one of the pelvic exercises that also helps build the core support your back relies on as your belly grows.

Child's Pose



Kneel with your big toes touching and your knees spread wide enough to comfortably accommodate your belly. Sit back onto your heels and reach your arms forward, lowering your chest toward the floor. Hold for **20 to 30 seconds**, breathing deeply — this is a gentle way to release tension across the lower back.

How to Prevent Back Pain During Pregnancy: A Quick Checklist

- Strengthen your back and core with pregnancy-safe exercise
- Maintain a healthy weight gain throughout pregnancy, as recommended by your provider
- Wear supportive, low-heeled shoes
- Avoid prolonged standing or sitting without breaks
- Lift with your legs, not your back, and avoid heavy lifting when possible
- Practice good posture, especially during long periods of sitting

- **Sleep on your side rather than your back or stomach.** [Mayo Clinic](#) notes that keeping one or both knees bent and placing a pregnancy pillow between your knees, under your belly, or behind your back can make side-sleeping more comfortable and take pressure off your spine

Frequently Asked Questions

What causes back pain during pregnancy?

Back pain during pregnancy is most often caused by a combination of hormonal changes (specifically the hormone relaxin loosening pelvic ligaments), a shifting center of gravity as the belly grows, added weight on the spine, and weakening abdominal muscles that normally help support the back.

Can back pain be an early sign of pregnancy?

For some women, yes — hormonal changes in the first trimester can cause mild back discomfort. However, [according to medical experts](#), back pain is not one of the most common early pregnancy symptoms; missed periods, nausea, and fatigue tend to appear first.

Can back pain mean I'm going into labor?

It can, in some cases. Rhythmic back pain that comes in waves and increases in intensity and frequency — rather than pain that's constant or triggered by position — [may be a sign of labor](#), especially before your due date. If you notice this pattern, contact your provider right away.

Can my baby's position cause more back pain?

Yes. [According to Cleveland Clinic](#), if the baby is positioned with its head against your tailbone or lower back, you may feel more back pain than usual.

Does back pain during pregnancy go away after delivery?

For most women, yes — symptoms typically ease within the weeks after delivery as hormone levels and posture return to normal. For some, mild discomfort can persist longer, especially without ongoing core and back strengthening.

Can a seat cushion help with pregnancy back pain?

For women who sit for extended periods at work or during commutes, a supportive, well-designed [seat cushion](#) can help redistribute weight and reduce pressure on the lower back and tailbone — though it works best alongside movement breaks, good posture, and the other strategies in this guide, not as a replacement for them.