

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Chiropractic for a Comfortable Pregnancy

Low-back pain is one of the most common complaints Dr. Smith hears from pregnant patients. Over half of pregnant women experience back pain at some point — not a surprising statistic since the physical changes a woman undergoes during pregnancy place an enormous burden on her spine and pelvis. When added to the other discomforts that pregnancy can bring, back pain seriously interferes with daily activities for moms-to-be.

Rather than suffering silently or taking a gamble with painkillers, more and more pregnant women are turning to chiropractic care to ease low-back pain. Read on as Dr. Smith describes the unique issues facing the expectant mother's spine — and how chiropractic care can relieve her back pain and free her to enjoy her pregnancy.

Why Pregnancy Causes Back Pain

During pregnancy, a woman typically gains 25 to 35 pounds (11 to 16 kilograms). The baby, uterus, placenta and amniotic fluid account for a great deal of this weight, moving the mother's center of gravity forward to the front of her pelvis. As the baby grows, the increased weight pushes the pelvis out, making the curvature of the mother's lower back more pronounced. The extra stress causes low-back pain (*J Am Chiropr Assoc* 2003;40:29-30).

In the third trimester, back or leg pain may also result from the baby's head pressing down on a major nerve, such as the sciatic nerve or lumbar nerve (*Spine* 1987;12:368-71).

Additionally, the third trimester brings a spike in relaxin, the hormone produced by the mother's body to relax pelvic joints in preparation for delivery. Unfortunately, it also weakens other joints — like those in the spine — leaving them unstable and prone to pain (*J Am Chiropr Assoc* 2003;40:18-

24).

Painkillers: Not Worth the Risks

Over-the-counter pain medication may seem like an easy solution, and many healthcare providers assure pregnant women that they are safe during pregnancy. However, Dr. Smith is concerned about the possible effects of drugs on fetal development.

A newly-published study questioned 2,800 pregnant women on their use of painkillers and later correlated their responses with health assessments of their newborns. Researchers discovered a clear association between prenatal analgesic use and undescended testicles in infant boys. This supports findings from animal trials that the

drugs impair hormones needed for fetuses to develop male sex traits (*Hum Reprod* 2011;26:235-44).

Another investigation of prenatal exposure to NSAIDs — nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen — revealed that the medications increased likelihood of physical deformities in rats (*Reprod Toxicol* 2009;28:239-44)

Dr. Smith discourages all patients from relying on painkillers, citing hazards like liver toxicity and gastrointestinal complications (*Med J Aust* 2008;188:296-301).

The additional risks for the unborn child mean these medications more than outweigh the short-term relief they may provide.

Chiropractic Relieves Pain

Chiropractors champion a drug-free approach to pain that supports the body's self-healing power.



Steven L. Smith, DC, Hickory Chiropractic Clinic, PLLC
256 Third Avenue NW, Hickory, NC 28601 (828) 323-8998
www.hickorychiro.com contact@hickorychiro.com

Many complaints — including back pain — are rooted in misalignments in the spinal bones or vertebrae. These problem areas are called **vertebral subluxations**.

Doctors of chiropractic correct vertebral subluxations with **chiropractic adjustments** — gentle maneuvers that put the spine back in alignment and relieve pain. Since the physical changes of pregnancy can cause or exacerbate vertebral subluxations, chiropractic care is an ideal therapy for mothers-to-be.

Researchers confirm that chiropractic effectively relieves pregnancy-related back pain. In one trial, 16 of 17 patients experienced significant improvement after an average of two sessions with a chiropractor, and none displayed adverse side effects (*J Midwifery Womens Health* 2006;51:e7-10).

Easier Labor

Here's more good news for expectant moms: Chiropractic adjustments during pregnancy may actually make childbirth more comfortable. A retrospective study of 170 women who had experienced back pain during pregnancy found that those who had received chiropractic care had less pain during labor. These women also had a lower incidence of "back labor," which is labor marked by excruciating lower back pain (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1991;14:116-8).

A Safe Respite from Headaches

Many women — especially those who had previously suffered from regular migraines — have fewer headaches during pregnancy. However, some women experience chronic headaches for the first time while they are expecting (*Expert Rev Neurother* 2008;8:385-95).

One case study followed a 24-year-old pregnant woman who had experienced chronic migraine headaches for 12 years. Conventional drugs and physical therapy provided only minimal relief. Chiropractic care greatly relieved her migraines and helped her enjoy her pregnancy without relying

on painkillers (*Complement Ther Clin Pract* 2009;15:192-7).

Chronic headaches in pregnancy usually result from a combination of hormonal changes and the physical and emotional stress of carrying a child, but can sometimes be a sign of preeclampsia, a complication marked by hypertension (*Nat Rev Neurol* 2009;5:449-56). That's why the doctor encourages pregnant women to monitor their blood pressure.

A Solution for Breech Babies

A particular chiropractic technique can make a huge difference for moms-to-be whose babies have not "turned" to a head-down position by the eighth month of gestation. *Breech presentation* — the baby positioned with feet or buttocks toward the birth canal — occurs in about one in 25 pregnancies. It often prompts healthcare providers to recommend a Caesarean section.

Many chiropractors have training in the *Webster technique*, a simple and safe adjustment that balances the alignment of bones in the pelvis and associated muscles and ligaments. Unlike other methods for correcting a breech presentation, the Webster technique does not directly move the baby, but simply makes it easier for the baby to move itself.

The Webster technique reduces constraint on the uterus from the mother's musculoskeletal system, giving the baby space to turn naturally to the correct head-down position (*Midwifery Today* 2001;58:42).

A survey of chiropractors who perform the Webster technique shows an impressive 82 percent success rate. Comparatively, only 9 percent of fetuses with breech presentation at 34 weeks turn spontaneously (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2002;25:E1-9).

Pregnant? Make a Chiropractic Appointment Today!

This chiropractic office enjoys being a part of the care team for moms-to-be. Whether you just got a positive result on your pregnancy test or are due next week, call today and experience the difference chiropractic can make in your pregnancy.

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Tips to Relieve Back Pain While You're Expecting

- ✓ Maintain regular chiropractic care, even if you are not in pain.
- ✓ Place a pillow between your knees and sleep on your side to relieve stress on your lower back.
- ✓ Skip the stilettos — stick with flat or low-heeled shoes for safety and back comfort while your center of gravity is in flux.
- ✓ Give extra attention to workplace ergonomics. Sit up straight in a supportive chair, add a cushion for your back if necessary, and use a small stool or footrest to take strain off of your legs and back.
- ✓ Exercise to keep your back muscles strong and better able to support your changing body. Walking, swimming and stationary cycling are good low-impact choices during pregnancy.