

# Pain Management Through Pregnancy

*“So, just go ahead, sit down. Roll around.”*

Aches and pains are a normal part of pregnancy as these women are well aware.

*“I would like start to get, you know, that pain. I’d feel some pain. Not really back pain so much, but just round ligament pain and just aches.”*

Round ligament pain is the most common pain women experience in pregnancy. It can be a sharp, pulling sensation or feeling of pressure in the lower abdomen or pelvic area. Stretching exercises can be helpful.

*“It just keeps all that pain right around here at bay, for the most part.”*

*“Try to hug your baby high and tight. If you can, draw that bellybutton back to your spine.”*

Exercises that strengthen the core, or abdominal muscles, also help relieve round ligament pain as well as back pain.

*“The second biggest pain is usually back pain. You see a lot of that just with poor body mechanics. I tend to see it later on in pregnancy as you get a whole lot bigger and as the belly protrudes more forward, and we’re arching our back a lot causing a lot of discomfort.”*

Sciatic nerve pain, which can be felt in the lower back, buttocks and leg, is also common during pregnancy. Stretching exercises, massage, and physical therapy can help alleviate both sciatic and back pain.

*“Bring those hips up into a downward dog. Do the best you can to press your heels down into the mat.”*

Yoga can also help ease pain.

*“If you can’t get them to touch the mat, just go ahead and tread through your heels.”*

Some yoga poses are not safe during pregnancy, so it’s important to find a prenatal yoga class or an instructor familiar with pregnancy.

*“The whole idea is to have a nice big tuck jump to work on those lower abs. It’s like you’re jumping over and back that black line.”*

Water aerobics is another natural way to help relieve pain.

*“I do a lot of ab work in the water to get your abs to stay nice and tight and to focus on hugging your baby all day so that it can pull you upright and takes a lot of the pressure off your back as well.”*

Check with your provider to be sure exercise is safe for you during pregnancy. Using a heating pad on a low setting is another non-medication way of managing pain during pregnancy. But don’t place it on your abdomen.

*“You can put it low on the pelvis area. You could also use it in the back to maybe relieve some back discomfort.”*

A maternity belt can help as well.

*“It lifts the stomach up so that it kind of comes a little bit up out of the pelvis if you will and it puts a lot less pressure on the back.”*

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Another option is massage.

*"I like to talk to my patients about using a lot of massage. I want them to be very careful when they do see a massage therapist. Make sure that they are experienced, or they are certified as a prenatal massage person. Make sure they have a maternity table that can manage your belly."*

If you need something more to manage your pain, acetaminophen is the only over-the-counter pain reliever that providers typically recommend.

*"Acetaminophen is the safest pain medicine to use during pregnancy, and for a lot of women, that can be perfectly adequate for a lot of aches and pains that they'd feel, especially when treated along with the other non-medication treatments."*

Always check with your provider first before using any pain reliever, even if over the counter.

*"How is your back? It still hurts."*

As Samantha Hudson has learned during her pregnancy, sometimes severe pain can occur that requires prescription pain relievers.

*"The first pain that I had was at 23 weeks. I was actually asleep next to my husband, and I woke up screaming. It was pretty intense. It was through my back. Through my stomach."*

*"In her case, we felt like using a muscle relaxer could improve her pain significantly, and the medication we chose to use was one that was much older. We have a lot more experience with it in pregnancy."*

*"That's the baby's heart rate. She sounds really good in there."*

At 34 weeks, Samantha developed another pain condition: severe migraine headaches. Along with back pain, migraines are the most common type of chronic pain during pregnancy. As a first step, providers encourage women to identify and avoid migraine triggers.

*"Then other types of non-medicated approaches, like relaxation, mindfulness meditation, there are lots of exercises that can be helpful and relaxing in decreasing the pain."*

Acupuncture can also reduce lower back pain in pregnancy. For Samantha, none of these approaches helped enough, so her doctor prescribed narcotic pain medication.

*"It's always a balance between how much a woman is affected by the pain, the impact on her quality of life, the impact on her ability to function versus the potential that the medication may cause some problem for her, for the baby."*

Those problems can include: Premature birth, Low birthweight, and Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, which means the baby is born addicted to the pain medication and goes through withdrawal after birth.

At the same time, women should not feel they need to tough it out if their pain becomes intolerable because that can be dangerous too.

*"Addressing it before it becomes too severe can make it easier for her and her provider to limit the problem and maybe find an answer before it gets incapacitating."*

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Samantha feels she's found a balance between managing her pain and protecting her baby which will help ensure a safe pregnancy.

*"You all right? Mmm hmm. For a little bit longer."*