

## PREGNANCY, BACK PAIN & CORE STRENGTH

Studies suggest that up to 90 percent of pregnant women will experience low back and/or pelvic pain related to their pregnancy. The weight gain during pregnancy can also place additional stress on the hips, feet, ankles and knees. The pain also contributes to other problems, such as sleep disturbances, use of pain medication and disruption of activities of daily living — sometimes just standing for half an hour can prove too painful to manage.

As the baby grows, the abdominal muscles become stretched, and may not be able to provide as much support to the pelvis and spine. To help prevent low back pain and other aches, expectant mothers can perform simple core strengthening exercises that can help reduce stress on their back.

### Getting Started

#### Abdominal Bracing

Abdominal bracing is a helpful exercise to learn how to maintain mild abdominal contraction in order to support the lumbar spine. To correctly brace, you should attempt to contract your abdominal muscles. Be careful not to hold your breath - you should be able to breathe evenly while bracing.

Lay on your back with your spine in a neutral position. (neutral means maintaining the natural curve in your spine)

Keeping this position, concentrate on contracting your abdominal musculature without "drawing in".

**Important:** this involves hardening or tightening the muscles, **not** hollowing the abdominal area.

**Hold this position for 5-10 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times; perform 1-3 sets.**

Once mastered, this technique can be used to enhance all core stability exercises and during daily activities; i.e. lifting a baby. Maintaining this position will help you get the most out of all your core stability exercises and protect your spine.

#### Exercise moves

Building a strong core means doing exercises regularly that target the abdominal, hip and back muscles. Following are three exercises that help keep core muscles strong.



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## Pelvic Tilt

**Starting position:** This can be done sitting, standing, laying on your back or on all fours. Use abdominal muscles to slowly move your pelvis.

**The move:** Bring pubic bone forward tucking buttocks in with a "scooping" motion. Hold for 2-3 seconds. Then rock pelvis the opposite direction to arch the low back and direct buttocks out. Identify a pain free range of motion and work within that range.

**Repetitions:** Repeat 3-10 times. Gradually work up to 3 sets. Rest for 30-60 seconds between sets.

## Arm Extension

**Starting position:** Kneel down onto your hands and knees. Keep your spine in a neutral position and maintain an abdominal brace (by tightening stomach and buttock muscles.)

**The move:** Extend one arm out in front as much as you can – even a little way makes a difference. The goal is to make your arm parallel with the floor. Be sure to keep the rest of your body stable. Hold for 2-3 seconds. Return to starting position and switch sides.

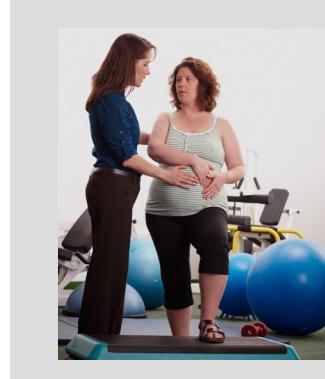
**Repetitions:** Repeat 3-10 times. Gradually work up to 3 sets. Rest for 30-60 seconds between sets.

## Leg Extension

**Starting position:** Kneel down onto your hands and knees. Keep your spine in a neutral position and maintain an abdominal brace (by tightening stomach and buttock muscles.)

**The move:** Extend one leg behind as much as you can – even a little way makes a difference. Be sure to keep your upper body stable. Hold for 2-3 seconds. Return to starting position and switch sides.

**Repetitions:** Repeat 3-10 times. Gradually work up to 3 sets. Rest for 30-60 seconds between sets.



*If you feel any pain or discomfort while performing any of these exercises, or within 72 hours of exercising, please cease performing these exercises and consult your health care provider.*

## Maintaining Good Posture During Pregnancy:

- As weight increases and shifts to the front of the body, pregnant women develop a tendency to slouch forward and round their shoulders.
- These changes can cause additional stress on the joints of the spine and muscles in the shoulders, mid to upper back and neck.
- Remember to keep your shoulders "down and back" and your chin slightly tucked.
- Exercises to stretch the front of the shoulder and chest strengthening the muscles between your shoulder blades will be helpful.

## After the Baby Arrives:

- When carrying your child hold them upright against your chest, avoid carrying your child on your hips as it will cause a postural imbalance which can lead to low back pain over time.
- Always sit in a chair with back support when feeding your baby and avoid leaning forward to reach your child's mouth straining your back. Use pillows and blankets to support the position of the baby.
- To safely lift your child have your feet shoulder width apart, keep your back completely straight and bend your knees, lift with both arms and your thigh muscles.
- Take time to do some quick stretching when baby is napping. Ten minutes a day can help raise energy levels and help you stay flexible while avoiding aches and pains.