

# Pregnancy-Related Muscle + Joint Issues

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There are many muscle and joint issues during and after pregnancy. Pelvic girdle pain is the most common. Symptoms range from mild to severe, vary from person to person and often worsen with straining, lifting, twisting, or changing positions. Pain can be felt:

- At the back of the pelvis over the sacrum
- At the front of the pelvis over the pubis bone
- Into the groin, perineum and buttocks

Pain can start anytime during pregnancy or labour and can last well after delivery. Aside from pelvic pain many women also suffer dyspareunia (painful intercourse).

## Causes of pelvic girdle pain

In the past, women were told stretched ligaments, pinched nerves or altered hormones were to blame, and pain would go away as soon as the baby is born. Many experts now recognize this is not true. While causes of pregnancy-related pelvic girdle pain are not well understood, the possibilities include:

- Lax ligaments due to hormonal changes in pregnancy
- Overactive or underactive pelvic and abdominal muscles
- Stress on the joints, muscles and ligaments during and after pregnancy
- Trauma to the pelvis and pelvic muscles during labour
- Genetically lax or loose joints

## How physiotherapists help

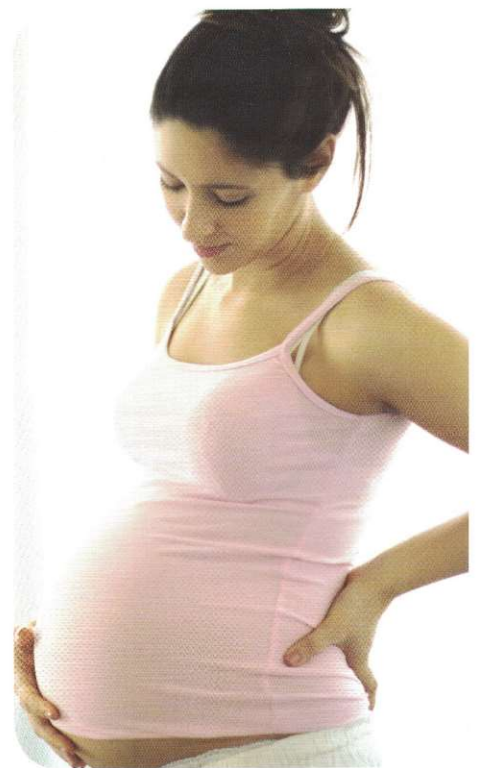
While all physiotherapists can help women with pregnancy-related pelvic pain, Alberta has a number of physiotherapists experienced in women's/ pelvic health and pregnancy-related pelvic issues.

The treatment approach will vary depending on the cause but individualized supervised treatment is preferable to more general pelvic pain therapies. Treatment may include one or all of the following:

- Education about postures, positioning and lifting during or after pregnancy
- Use of sacral belts or tape to support the pelvic girdle
- Manual therapy to restore normal joint and soft tissue movement
- Targeted pelvic or core muscle exercises to improve the control, endurance and strength to the core pelvic muscles
- Breathing techniques and targeted exercises to relax pelvic muscles that may be overactive
- Modalities (e.g., acupuncture, electrical stimulation) for pain control or muscle relaxation

## Your physiotherapist will:

- Take a detailed history
- Screen for medical conditions requiring medical follow-up
- Perform a detailed examination of joints and muscles affecting the pelvis
- Watch how you walk, sit, stand, bend and move



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