



Back Pain in Pregnancy and After Birth

One-page summary of the full Spinemathema guide. Scan the QR code for the full guide, with references and audio.

Key points

- Back and pelvic pain are very common in pregnancy. Estimates range from about 45% to more than two-thirds of pregnant women, depending on the study.
- Pelvic girdle pain (PGP), once called symphysis pubis dysfunction (SPD), is a separate problem that affects about 1 in 5 pregnant women. It is not harmful to your baby.
- Staying active and exercising, on land or in water, may help. A specialist pelvic health physiotherapist can assess and treat you at any stage of pregnancy.
- Check with your midwife, GP or pharmacist before taking any painkiller, as some are not suitable in pregnancy.
- Research has not found that epidurals in labour cause long-term back pain.

Get help straight away if you are pregnant or have recently had a baby and you have back pain with:

- Loss of feeling in one or both legs, your bottom or your genitals: call 999 or go to A&E.
- Pain or numbness in both legs at the same time, difficulty passing urine, bowel leakage you cannot control, or numbness around the vagina or back passage: go to A&E or call 999 straight away. These can be signs of pressure on the nerves at the bottom of the spine (cauda equina syndrome).
- A fever, bleeding from your vagina or pain when you pee: contact your GP or midwife urgently.
- Pain in one or both sides, under your ribs: contact your GP or midwife urgently.
- Back pain in the second or third trimester, especially with tightenings or contractions: this could be a sign of early labour.

For anything to do with your pregnancy, such as contractions, bleeding or reduced baby movements, call your midwife or maternity unit (often called maternity triage) straight away. Do not wait for your next appointment.

Not sure how urgent it is? Call NHS 111. More warning signs: spinemathema.com/warning-signs

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General information only, not personal medical advice.

If you are worried about your symptoms, contact your GP,

NHS 111, or in an emergency call 999.

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Scan for the full guide