

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Why Pregnant Women Need Chiropractic Care

Pregnancy is a wondrous time in a woman's life. However, it is also frequently marked by dramatic changes in a mother-to-be's posture and spinal function.

Dr. Gravesen cares for expectant mothers with a unique approach, aimed at keeping them in optimal wellness, so that they may be well-rested and full of energy when their bundle of joy arrives.

Read on to learn just a few of the reasons why pregnant women need chiropractic care.



Shorter Labors

Chiropractic may lessen labor pain by shortening the duration of labor. According to a study presented at the World Chiropractic Congress, first-time mothers who receive chiropractic care average 24 percent shorter labor times than women who are not under chiropractic care. And, chiropractic patients who have had previous children enjoy 39 percent shorter labors, compared with control subjects.

Chiropractic May Lessen Labor Pain

Women who experience back pain

throughout pregnancy often suffer back pain during delivery. However, expectant mothers who receive chiropractic care are less likely to battle backache during delivery (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1991;14:116-8).

Pregnancy & Back Pain

Backache is rampant among expectant mothers. One report concluded that 35.5 percent of moms-to-be endure "moderate to severe" back pain (*Aust NZ J Obstet Gynaecol* 2002;42:482-5).

According to another scientific study, roughly one half of all pregnant women battle backache (*Obstet Gynecol* 1988;71:71-5). Fortunately, there's a powerful and safe solution to pregnancy-related backache: chiropractic care. In fact, Dr. Gravesen helps many expectant moms prepare for their bundles of joy without the needless aggravation of back pain.

Simply the fact that pregnancy-related back pain is so widespread should motivate every expectant mother to focus on prevention. However, some women are at an even greater risk than others, according to a Swedish study of 804 moms-to-be. For example, a history of back pain doubles a woman's odds of backache during pregnancy. In addition, moms-to-be who have physically demanding jobs are more likely to develop back pain than are their peers with sedentary



occupations. Younger women tend to suffer from pregnancy-related backache more than older women — and mothers who have had previous children are at an elevated risk, compared with first-time moms (*Spine* 1991; 16:432-6).

Postural Changes

Dr. Gravesen explains to patients that postural changes are a significant instigating factor of back pain in pregnancy. As the baby grows, mom's center of gravity shifts forward. This results in an exaggerated lower back curve. This postural alteration triggers a chain effect, which disturbs the normal curves throughout the spine. The result? A disproportionate amount of stress directed at various muscles, bones and ligaments surrounding the spine.



**Katie Gravesen, DC, Sol Chiropractic (808) 270-2530
30 E Lipoa #4-102, Kihei, HI 96753 www.solchiro.com**

The Hormone Relaxin

Although backache occurs with similar frequency in both pregnant and nonpregnant women, back pain during pregnancy tends to be more severe. Why does pregnancy provoke such intense back discomfort? Chiropractors point to a condition called sacroiliac joint dysfunction (also called SI joint dysfunction or SI subluxation). Scientific research shows that SI joint dysfunction is the primary cause of pregnancy-related back pain (*Obstet Gynecol* 1988;71:71-5).



SI joint dysfunction involves misalignment or restricted movement in the sacrum and two iliac bones that form the pelvic girdle. In preparation for delivery, the body increases production of a hormone called relaxin. This hormone softens the ligaments that hold together the pelvic bones. Although this process facilitates delivery, it also undermines the alignment of the sacrum and adjacent iliac bones.

Scientific reports support the link between relaxin and SI joint dysfunction. One study looked at 200 expectant mothers. Early in their pregnancies, subjects underwent blood tests. Findings showed that women with high levels of relaxin were likely to develop back pain (*Am J Obstet Gynecol* 1999;180:128-34). Another study, which enrolled 403 women during late pregnancy, found that subjects with severe back pain had much higher levels of relaxin, compared with pain-free women (*Lancet* 1986;2:243-5).

The Spine's Role

Spinal misalignments are another sig-

nificant cause of pregnancy-related backache. Because the pelvis is the base of the spine, SI joint dysfunction can also affect spinal posture in the mid-back and neck. During pregnancy, a loosening of the abdominal muscles, which are instrumental in maintaining optimal posture, further aggravates postural problems.

Spinal misalignments result in a condition called **vertebral subluxation**. This disorder occurs when spinal motion is restricted or spinal bones (vertebrae) are out of alignment. A wealth of scientific evidence links vertebral subluxation with back pain. Chiropractors correct vertebral subluxations using gentle and effective maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**.

The Chiropractic Solution

Why should expectant mothers choose chiropractic to prevent and alleviate back pain? For several reasons. First, chiropractors work to correct the two main causes of pregnancy-related backache: SI joint dysfunction and vertebral subluxation. Also, chiropractic offers a drug-free approach to pain reduction. Since avoiding unnecessary medication is essential to preventing birth defects, chiropractic provides relief without the worry that comes from taking medication.

And here's another reason to give chiropractic a try: scientific studies prove it works. Research has demonstrated that this unique health-care approach is highly effective for ending pregnancy-related back pain. For instance, one study that examined expectant mothers with SI joint dysfunction concluded, "After manipulative therapy [chiropractic adjustment], 10 of the 11 women (91%) had relief of pain and no longer exhibited signs of sacroiliac subluxations." (*Fam Prac Res J* 1991;11:149-159.)

A plethora of scientific studies also establishes chiropractic as the most potent technique for halting low-back pain associated with vertebral subluxations.

New Moms Need Chiropractic

If left unaddressed, 68 percent of women who experience moderate or severe low-back pain during pregnancy continued to suffer recurring low-back pain with a self-reported reduction in their health (*Aust NZ J Obstet Gynaecol* 2002;42:482-5).

That's why, it's important to continue focusing on back pain prevention even after your baby arrives — especially if you experienced backache during pregnancy (*Spine* 1992;17:53-5).

To avert postpartum backache, prevent vertebral subluxations with regular chiropractic checkups. And, ask your doctor of chiropractic to teach you back-safe baby lifting and carrying techniques.

Don't Let Spinal Dysfunction Encumber Your Pregnancy

More than one third of mothers-to-be who suffer from back pain feel that it significantly interferes with their daily activities. And 10 percent of expectant moms miss work due to back discomfort (*Obstet Gynecol* 1988;71:71-5).

Pregnancy should be an opportunity to reflect on your family's plans and dreams — not a time to struggle with pain. Preparing for a new baby is a daunting challenge for even the most organized mothers-to-be. So, during this meaningful time, be proactive: work to prevent backache before it affects your peace of mind or distracts you from focusing on your family's well-being. Make an appointment today for a chiropractic evaluation.

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