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S O L U T I O N S INC.

**Gorman Optimal Health Solutions, Inc.**  
**333 North Oxford Valley Rd.**  
**Suite 502**  
**Fairless Hills, PA 19030**  
**215-9-HEALTH (943-2584)**  
**[www.GormanOptimalHealth.com](http://www.GormanOptimalHealth.com)**

### **Chiropractic Advice For Moms-To-Be**

The weight gain, the bloating, the nausea... Most new mothers will tell you that the aches and pains of pregnancy are a small price to pay for the beautiful bundle of joy they're rewarded with nine months later.

But as many new mothers can attest, the muscle strains of pregnancy are very real and can be more than just a nuisance. The average weight gain of 25 to 35 pounds, combined with the increased stress placed on the body by the baby, can sometimes result in severe discomfort. In fact, studies have found that about half of all expectant mothers will develop low back pain at some point during their pregnancy. This is especially true during late pregnancy, when the baby's head presses down on a woman's back, legs and buttocks, putting pressure on her sciatic nerve. And for those who already suffer from low back pain, the problem can become even worse.

During pregnancy, a woman's center of gravity almost immediately begins to shift forward to the front of her pelvis, according to Dr. Jerome McAndrews, spokesperson for the American Chiropractic Association (ACA). Although a woman's sacrum— or posterior section of her pelvis— has more depth than a man's to enable her to carry a baby, the displaced weight still increases the

stress on her joints. "As the baby grows in size," Dr. McAndrews explains, "the woman's weight is projected even farther forward, and the curvature of her lower back is increased, placing extra stress on her spinal disks in that area. As a result, the spine in the upper back area must compensate— and the normal curvature of her upper spine increases as well."

While these changes sound dramatic, Mother Nature does step in to help accommodate them. During pregnancy, hormones are released that help loosen the ligaments attached to the pelvic bones. But even these natural changes designed to accommodate the growing baby can result in postural imbalances, causing pregnant women to be more prone to awkward trips and falls.

### **What Can You Do?**

The following tips are recommended for pregnant women looking for relief from the discomforts of pregnancy:

- Safe exercise during pregnancy can help strengthen your muscles and prevent discomfort. Try exercising at least three times a week— preceded and followed up by a gentle stretching routine. If you weren't active before your pregnancy, however, now is not the time to start a new fitness routine. Check with your doctor before starting or continuing any exercise regimen during pregnancy.  
Walking, swimming and stationary cycling are relatively safe cardiovascular exercises for pregnant women, because they do not require jerking or bouncing movements. Even jogging, however, can be safe for women who were avid runners before becoming pregnant— if done carefully and under the supervision of a doctor.  
Whatever exercise routine you choose, be sure to do it in an area with secure footing to minimize the likelihood of falls. Also, be certain that your heart rate does not exceed 140 beats per minute during exercise, and that strenuous activity lasts no more than 15 minutes at a time.  
Stop your exercise routine immediately if you notice any unusual symptoms, such as vaginal bleeding, dizziness, nausea, weakness, blurred vision, increased swelling or heart palpitations.
- Wear flat, sensible shoes. Not only can high or chunky heels be uncomfortable, they can also exacerbate postural imbalances and cause you to be less steady on your feet than you already are. This is especially true as you get farther along in your pregnancy.
- When picking up older children— or any other object for that matter— bend from the knees, not the waist. And never turn your head when you lift. Just to be on the safe side, avoid picking up heavy objects altogether, if possible.

- When sleeping, lie on your side with a pillow between your knees to take pressure off your lower back. Many women find that full-length "body pillows" or "pregnancy wedges" are especially helpful during pregnancy. Lying on your left side is ideal. This position allows unobstructed blood flow, and helps your kidneys flush waste from your body.
- If you have a job that requires you to sit at a computer for long hours, be sure your workstation is ergonomically correct. Position the computer monitor so the top of the screen is at or below your eye level, and place your feet on a small footrest to take pressure off your legs and feet. Also, take periodic breaks every 30 minutes by taking a quick walk around the office.
- Eat small meals or snacks every four to five hours— rather than the usual three large meals— to help keep nausea or extreme hunger at bay. Good snacks include crackers or yogurt— bland foods that are high in carbohydrates and protein. Keep saltines in your desk drawer or purse to help stave off waves of "morning sickness" that can, unfortunately, occur at any time throughout the day.
- Folic acid supplements— at least 400 micrograms (mcg) a day— before and during pregnancy have been shown to decrease the risk of neural tube birth defects, such as spina bifida. Some doctors recommend even more for women who are already pregnant, or who previously gave birth to a child with a neural tube defect. However, check with your doctor before taking this or any other vitamin or herbal supplement. Some herbs and supplements that are considered perfectly safe for non-pregnant women can be dangerous or harmful to the baby or expectant mother.
- Get plenty of rest. Don't let the demands of work and family life put you and your baby at risk. Pamper yourself, and ask for help if you need it. Take a nap if you're tired, or lie down and elevate your feet for a few moments when you need a break.

### **Visit the Chiropractor**

Visit your doctor of chiropractic. Before you become pregnant, your doctor of chiropractic can detect any pre-existing imbalances in the pelvis or elsewhere in your body that could make pregnancy discomfort even worse— or leave you with additional neuro-musculoskeletal problems after childbirth.

Many pregnant women have found that chiropractic adjustments provide relief from the increased low back pain brought on by pregnancy. Also, scientific studies have found that spinal manipulation carries no increased risk to the pregnant woman or her baby. Chiropractic's non-drug, non-surgical approach to back pain can be especially attractive to pregnant women who are trying to avoid over-the-counter and prescription drugs. Doctors of chiropractic can also offer

nutrition, ergonomic and exercise advice that will help you avoid the discomforts of pregnancy.

Chiropractic care can also be helpful after childbirth. In the eight weeks following labor and delivery, the ligaments that loosened during pregnancy begin to tighten up again. Ideally, joint problems brought on during pregnancy from improper lifting or reaching should be treated before the ligaments return to their pre-pregnancy state. In addition, as the upper and lower spine return to normal, muscle tension, headaches, rib discomfort and shoulder problems can result. Your doctor of chiropractic can help.

**Our goal is to stimulate your body's natural healing process.**

Information provided courtesy of the  
American Chiropractic Association (ACA)  
[www.amerchiro.org](http://www.amerchiro.org)