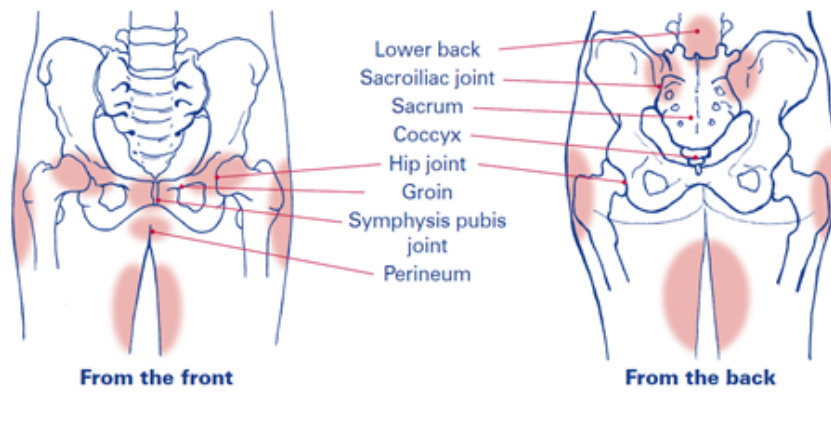


## Managing Back and Pelvic Girdle Pain during Pregnancy

### What is Pelvic Girdle Pain?

Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP) is the term given to pain at the pubic bone at the front, your lower back, buttocks, groin or perineum (area between vagina and anus). Back pain can be in the lower or upper back and can be new in pregnancy or a continuation of previous issues.



Your pelvis is very resilient and able to adapt to the demands of pregnancy, childbirth and childcare despite how unstable it may feel to you at times

Postural changes in the back and pelvis are normal, safe and necessary to support the growing demands of pregnancy and birth. However staying in one position for long periods of time or moving awkwardly can aggravate your back or PGP so regular changes of position and using effective movement strategies can help a lot! Pacing your activities during the day can make things easier also.

Understanding your pain, improving emotional wellbeing, sleep optimisation, and regular exercise that you enjoy are very helpful to reduce back and PGP. Our back and PGP class will teach you how to manage your symptoms and improve your mobility. If you are not improving with the techniques and information from the class, you can make an individual appointment for assessment. Belts and/or manual therapy may be used if you are not improving.

### Back and Pelvic Girdle Pain Videos:

You can find our videos for PGP on the Rotunda YouTube channel and the Rotunda Website by selecting Support and then Physiotherapy. You may like the Bump room online classes; you can see some examples of those on YouTube. There are options for women with mild symptoms and more severe symptoms. There is a discount for Rotunda patients.

Around **50%** of pregnant women experience back and PGP. The causes can vary and it may be aggravated by:

- Stress, lack of sleep, tension and changes in the activity of the tummy, pelvic girdle, hip and/or pelvic floor muscles

- Hormonal changes making tissues more flexible to make space for baby, but also increasing sensitivity of the soft tissues
- The weight and position of baby
- Asymmetrical movement of the pelvic joints
- Pre-existing tissue sensitivity from back pain

Back and PGP is not harmful to your baby. You may have trouble with activities such as:

- Walking for long distances
- Moving your knees apart suddenly e.g. getting in and out of bed or car
- Standing on one leg e.g. getting dressed or climbing stairs or certain yoga poses
- Standing for long periods
- Sitting for long periods
- Turning in bed
- Lifting toddlers or heavy shopping/laundry

### **Managing your Back and PGP**

The following simple measures may help:

- Staying active but also getting plenty of rest, get to bed early and avoid screens for an hour before bed to wind down and relax the body. Practice abdominal breathing before sleep to calm down the nervous system. You may find the Mind the bump app helpful.
- Use the self-treatment techniques below to reduce muscle tension before bed
- Avoid activities that make the pain worse or modify them to make them easier. Go for walks earlier in the day instead of the evening when possible.
- Changing your position frequently – try not to sit for more than 30 minutes at a time, get up and move for a few minutes. If standing, sit down and take a few minutes break
- Many women with back and PGP find it comfortable to sit on a gym ball while working at the PC or watching TV.
- Wear supportive shoes and avoid high heels and stand with equal weight through both feet
- Sit down to get dressed and undressed
- Avoid crossing legs when sitting or standing
- Go up the stairs one step at a time, leading with the pain-free leg first. When going down, lead with the more painful leg.
- Sit down to cuddle toddlers, avoid carrying them when you can.
- Ask for help with household tasks, break them down into smaller loads and take your time with regular breaks. Get heavy shopping delivered rather than pushing a heavy trolley.

### **Sleeping with PGP**

- When getting into bed, sit at the edge of the bed and lower your head to the pillows, then bring your legs up onto the bed.

- Remember from 16 weeks onwards it is recommended that you sleep lying on your side. Try to lie on the least painful side.
- Do some spiky ball release before going to bed.
- You may find it helpful to put a folded double duvet under your sheet, or use a thick mattress protector to soften the surface underneath you.
- If it is comfortable, use a pillow in between your legs and another pillow under your side, supporting your bump. As the bump gets bigger, you will not need a pillow underneath.
- You may find a Mama Turn sliding sheet helpful for rolling over, or wear satin pyjama bottoms. Or try rolling by going onto your hands and knees and over onto the other side.
- When getting out of bed, lie on your side, bring your feet out over the edge of the bed and use your arm to push yourself up into a sitting position.



### Getting in and out of the car

- If it is painful getting into the car, sit on the seat first and try to keep your knees together or step them into the car. A plastic bag on the seat may help you to turn.
- When driving, put a lumbar support or a rolled up towel behind your back to help you sit up comfortably in the car. When you stop in traffic, try to relax the legs by putting on the handbrake every time you stop and wiggle the legs to loosen the thigh muscles.



## Pelvic Floor and Core

The muscles of your pelvic floor and core help support and control the pelvis and low back. Exercise these muscles three times a day to help manage PGP. **If you are having bladder or bowel or prolapse symptoms, contact us for an assessment of your pelvic floor or to book into the pelvic floor class.**

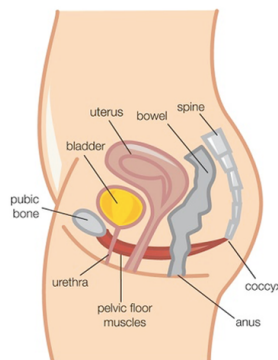
### Pelvic floor muscle exercises:

Breathe into your tummy and allow your ribcage to expand outwards. As you gently breathe out, imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and then urine. Squeeze and lift around the three openings in the pelvic floor muscles, from the back passage towards the front. The pelvic floor muscles have both a squeeze and a lifting action. Keep your abdominal, buttock and thigh muscles relaxed and continue breathing normally throughout the exercise. If you experience pain while doing these exercises please contact the physiotherapy department.

**Long holds:** Hold for up to 10 seconds and then let go fully. Rest for 10 seconds. Repeat up to 10 times.

**Quick squeezes:** Breathe normally as you quickly squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles strongly and hold for a second before letting go fully. It is important to feel the muscle release fully before you squeeze again. Picture a yo-yo dropping up and down. Repeat this up to 10 times in a row.

The squeezezy app can be a helpful tool to remind you to do your exercises.



### Deep abdominal muscle exercises:

Breathe in and feel your tummy rise. Breathe out and gently tighten your lower tummy muscles by drawing your lower belly in towards your spine. Hold for 5 seconds while continuing to breathe normally, then relax. Repeat 5-10 times.

## Sample Exercise Programme

These exercises help most women with PGP, back and rib pain. If an exercise is too difficult or makes your pain worse, check your technique to ensure you are following the instructions correctly. If it is still too difficult or painful, leave that exercise out and try a different one that day and come back to it another time.

Aim to do these exercises once a day.

### 1. Pelvic Tilt

- Starting position: Sitting up tall on gym ball or a chair
- Breathe in and as you breathe out draw in your abdominal muscles and tilt your pelvis back so that you are sitting on your tailbone and lowest part of your spine
- Breathe in as you sit up straight again
- Repeat 15-20 times



### 2. Roll-down

- Starting Position: Sitting tall on the ball

- Begin by dropping your head allowing your shoulders, mid-back and lower back to follow as you slide your hands down the front of your legs
- Hold for 5 seconds and slowly stack back up
- Repeat 5-10 times



### 3. Child's Pose

- Starting position: On hands and knees
- Sit back onto your heels and stretch your arms out in front
- Hold for 30 seconds breathing deeply
- Repeat 3 times



### 4. Cat Stretch



- Starting Position: On hands and knees, ensure your hands are under your shoulders and your knees are under hips
- Draw in your tummy as you arch your back up like a cat as far as comfortable
- Hold for 5 seconds before returning to neutral position
- Repeat 10-15 times



## 5. Clam Shell

- Starting position: Lying on your side with your knees and hips bent
- Gently draw in your tummy
- Lift your top knee away from your bottom knee as far as is comfortable. Keep your ankles touching
- Do not let your pelvis roll backwards
- Repeat 15 times on each side



## 6. Squat

- Starting position: Stand with feet hip distance apart
- Squat down as if you are sitting down on a chair to a comfortable level
- Push back up to your starting position
- Repeat 15 times



## 7. Side stretch

- Starting position: Sitting on gym ball or chair
- Lean over to one side and reach your arm up and over
- Hold for 5 seconds
- You can add a rotation in by pointing your chest down towards the ground as you reach over.
- Repeat 5 times on each side



## 8. Piriformis Stretch



- Starting position: On hands and knees
- Cross your left foot over your right foot and then lean back towards your left foot
- Hold the stretch for 30 seconds
- Repeat 3 times on each side



## 9. Thread the Needle

- Starting Position: On hands and knees
- Glide one hand under your body with your palm facing the ceiling as you allow your back to rotate.
- Slowly bring that arm back and open your chest as you raise that hand towards the ceiling
- Repeat 5 times on each side



## Exercise Ball and Spiky Ball

Gym balls can be used for exercise in pregnancy and comfort in labour.

### Finding the correct size:

If you are under 5'5": 55cm diameter ball

If you are 5'6" or over: 65cm diameter ball

You can purchase a ball in Argos nationwide, most sports shops, [www.physioneeds.com](http://www.physioneeds.com) or Murray Medical on Talbot Street.

Make sure you buy a ball made from **anti-burst** material which means the ball will slowly deflate if punctured. Ensure your hips are slightly higher than your knees, so make sure you pump it up well.



**Spiky Ball Release:** Standing next to the wall, place the ball between the wall and your buttock muscles on the sore side. If you find a tender point, stay on that spot for up to 60 seconds or until you find the pain begin to relieve. Gently breathe into your tummy as you hold the pressure at a moderate level. Do this one to three times a day for pain relief. It is especially helpful before bed.

You can purchase a yellow spiky ball from the Rotunda shop, or [www.newvision.ie](http://www.newvision.ie) or Murray Medical on Talbot Street. You can also use a tennis ball.



### Inner thigh massage and tension point release

Massage the inner thigh muscles from the knee to the upper groin, using long deep strokes and some massage cream for 5 to 10 mins. Then wipe away the cream and search for tension points by running your hands along the inner thigh muscles. When you find a point that feels like a hard, small knot that produces pain, press gently into it for about 30- 60

seconds or until the pain has decreased or gone away completely. As you press, breathe gently into your tummy to help the brain to let go of the tension. You may find it more comfortable to use the spiky ball to press on the tension points or use your thumb.

### **Tubigrip or Belly bra**

Either of these supports can be very helpful for supporting weak tummy muscles and encouraging tight muscles to relax. This can be very helpful for back pain. You can get some Tubigrip from the physiotherapy department or outpatients when available, or buy the Bellybra at [www.umamma.ie](http://www.umamma.ie)

### **Heat and Ice**

A hotpack can be very soothing for low back or buttock pain.

Ice packs are particularly helpful for the pubic joint at the front.

Use for 15 mins a few times a day if you can.

Never fall asleep with heat or ice on, as you can get a burn.

### **PGP during Labour and Delivery**

Most women with PGP have a normal vaginal delivery. Vaginal births have a lower risk for persistent PGP. Let your Midwife or Doctor know about your symptoms, they will help you to change position and make you as comfortable as possible.

### **Pregnancy related PGP Postnatally**

PGP usually improves after birth. A small percentage of women will have ongoing pain and may require follow-up with their local Physiotherapist for back or PGP. If you have any issues with bladder or bowel control, painful sex or prolapse symptoms you can self refer to Rotunda physiotherapy up to 6 months postnatally for these symptoms.

Book into our postnatal class for advice and education about recovering after childbirth.

Email [physiotherapy@rotunda.ie](mailto:physiotherapy@rotunda.ie) before 6 -8 weeks postnatal to book the class.

You can view our postnatal videos on the Rotunda website also.

### **Further Help:**

You can find videos on managing back and pelvic girdle pain, and pelvic floor exercises on the Physiotherapy page on the Rotunda website. [www.rotunda.ie/physio/](http://www.rotunda.ie/physio/)

For further information or if you need to make a 1 to 1 appointment due to your symptoms not improving, please contact The Rotunda Physiotherapy Department on **01-8171787** or email [physiotherapy@rotunda.ie](mailto:physiotherapy@rotunda.ie)

### Discount codes for Rotunda patients

Bump room classes - [www.thebumproom.ie](http://www.thebumproom.ie)    bumproom25off

Mamatern sheet - [www.easiturn.com](http://www.easiturn.com)    discount code **ROTUNDA10**

Aquaformums.ie    **10% off first block of classes**



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