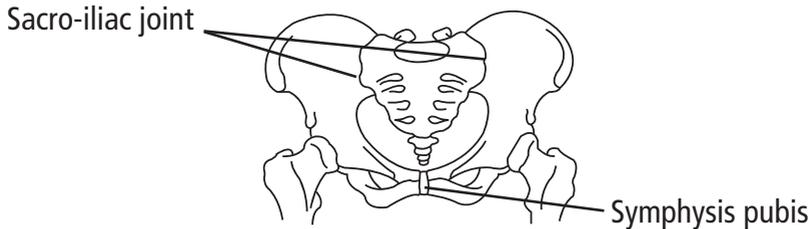


Pregnancy related pelvic girdle pain

Formerly known as
Symphysis Pubis Dysfunction (SPD)



The pelvic girdle is made up of 3 bones. The joint at the front of the pelvis is called the symphysis pubis and the two joints at the back are called the sacro iliac joints. During pregnancy hormones soften the ligaments in these joints to prepare for labour. This may cause pelvic or low back pain.



Symptoms

Pain is usually felt over the symphysis pubis and may also be felt in the groin and inner thighs. You may also have low back pain. Walking, carrying things and certain activities such as getting in and out of the bath or car may also cause pain.

Treatment

Antenatal treatment is designed to relieve pain and increase comfort. Careful management of the symptoms after the birth should relieve all problems.

Antenatal

Rest as much as possible, in a position which is comfortable, such as:

- lying with your knees bent and supported
- lying on your side with a pillow between your knees
- sitting with your knees slightly apart
- avoid sitting with legs crossed.

Also:

- try not to be on your feet for too long
- if possible sit down to do activities, such as ironing, preparing food, changing nappies

- when walking take small steps, wear flat supportive shoes
- avoid any activity which brings on the pain / makes the pain worse
- avoid lifting and putting strain on your back, such as carrying shopping, toddlers or washing. If you have to lift, use your legs to take the strain and not your back. Make sure that you keep your knees together.
- load or unload the washing machine by sitting on a chair in front of it
- avoid straddle movements which mean moving with knees apart, such as:
 - getting in and out of the car. Try to keep your knees together
 - getting in and out of the bath. Shower if possible, if not use another person for support, sit on the bath edge and swing around with your knees together
 - getting in and out of bed. When moving in bed try to keep your legs together particularly when moving from side to side. Do not push with one foot as this will make your pain and problem worse. Push equally with both feet to move about the bed
 - some positions for sexual intercourse (lying on your side with upper leg supported) may be more comfortable than others.
- avoid activities which involve standing on one leg:
 - getting dressed – sit down to put on underwear, socks or trousers
 - when climbing up or down stairs do one step at a time. Alternatively use your bottom – but remember to push equally with both feet at the same time
 - if using crutches, go up and down stairs as you were taught by your physiotherapist.

Sporting activities

Take extreme caution with sporting and leisure activities, and take the following steps:

- avoid breaststroke when swimming
- avoid exercise classes, which involve repetitive weight bearing
- take care not to over stretch in aqua-aerobics
- avoid cycling

- sit or kneel while you are gardening and avoid heavy lifting
- Avoid high impact exercise eg. running, racquet sports etc.

Exercises

You should do the following exercises:

1. Knee squeezing

Hold something firm that is the size of your fist, between your knees (eg. a ball), squeeze your knees together and hold for 10 seconds. Repeat up to 10 times, 2-3 times a day.

This exercise may help to re-align the symphysis pubis bones. It could be painful at first but as the problem improves it will become less painful.

2. Pelvic floor exercises

Do these exercises as you were taught by your physiotherapist. Because these muscles attach to the back of the symphysis pubis bones they will also help to strengthen them and ease the problem.

3. Pelvic tilt

Once again, do these exercises as you were taught by your physiotherapist. The pelvic tilt will help speed up the healing of your symphysis pubis pain, as well as strengthen your tummy muscles.

4. Deep abdominal exercise

Lie on your side. Let your tummy relax. Breathe in. Breathe out and gently draw your lower abdomen in towards your spine. Hold for a few seconds, breathing normally. Your back and pelvis should not move.

If you have pain or swelling you may find it helpful to use an ice pack. You can make your own by using a bag of ice cubes or frozen peas, wrapped in a tea towel or cloth. Place this over the painful area outside your underwear. Leave it for about 10 minutes and repeat every 2-3 hours if necessary.

The physiotherapist may advise you about a support to help ease your pain.

Lycra garments may also be helpful.

Labour and delivery

Prior to delivery open your legs and remember how far you are able to do this before the pain starts. Ask your partner to also remember how far this is. Try to avoid going any further during labour. This can be measured when lying on your back or sitting on the edge of a chair with feet apart.

Try to adopt a comfortable position in all stages of labour. You will be able to discuss this with your midwife.

Be aware that painkillers (although making labour more comfortable) will lessen your awareness of your pelvic pain.

Post natal

Rest as much as possible and follow the antenatal guidelines. After 24-48 hours of bed rest:

- start moving gradually. We may recommend that you use elbow crutches or a walking frame
- avoid lying on your side as this will aggravate your pain and the problem. Lying on your back to sleep should not be a problem after delivery
- lift nothing other than your baby. Even avoid this if some one else is around to help
- do not do any housework, shopping or taking other children to school, for at least 3, or possibly 6, weeks
- continue to avoid the straddle movements
- do not do any sport or physical exercise until discussed with your physiotherapist. High impact sports should be avoided for a few months.

Useful contacts

Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust Physiotherapy department

Tel: 01872 252885 / 252601

Pelvic, Obstetric and gynaecological physiotherapy interest group

www.POGP.org.uk

Pelvic Partnership

www.pelvicpartnership.org.uk

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

