



An tOspidéal Náisiúnta Máithreachais  
The National Maternity Hospital

## Physiotherapy Department

Managing upper back and rib pain in pregnancy



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Upper back and rib pain during pregnancy is a common symptom, especially in the third trimester.

It can be caused by several factors, including the growing baby putting pressure on the ribs, hormonal changes, and the baby's movements.

The sensation can range from mild discomfort to strong pain.

The pressure from the top of your growing uterus is often the cause

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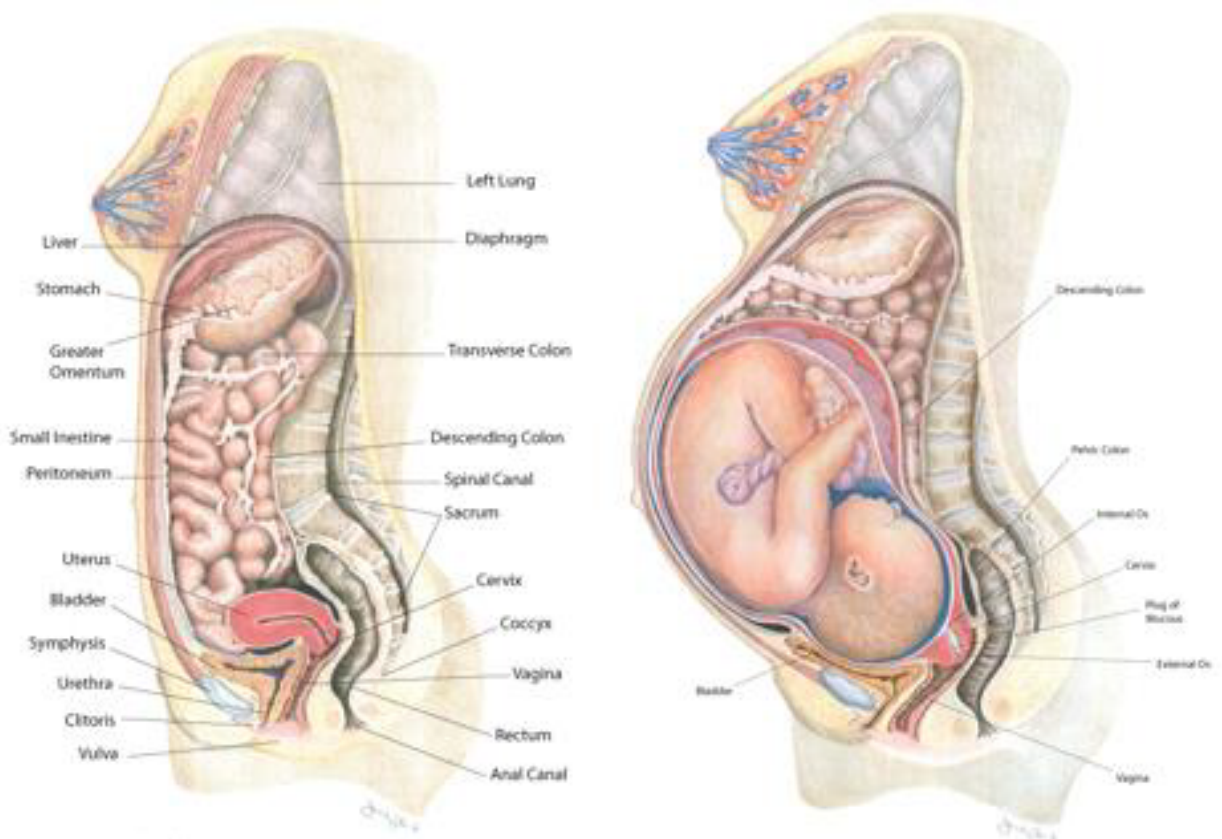


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# Symptoms

## Comfort & Movement

- If your baby is in a breech position, the pressure from his or her head wedged underneath your ribs might be the cause of your discomfort.
- This pain can be felt on the side of the baby's position and just below the breasts or at the back at the level of the bra-strap.
- This can more painful when sitting, more-so when leaning forward as sitting shortens the distance between our pelvis and ribcage. When we stand up our torso lengthens.
- While there's not much you can do to stop a growing uterus, there are some things you can do to get some temporary relief
- After 36 weeks, your baby drops into your pelvic cavity, in preparation for birth.
- This usually provides some much appreciated relief!



# Treatment

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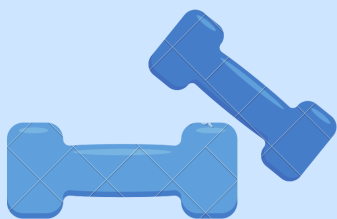
## Cold/heat therapy

- Try heat or ice for 15 mins on affected area for pain relief
- A nice hot shower on your back (be sensible with this one – not too hot!)



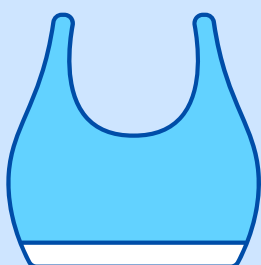
## Posture

- While posture is important, remember any posture for a prolonged period is going to cause discomfort. It is recommended to get up and move around every 30 minutes.



## Exercise

- Exercises that help you stretch out and support your body, like swimming.
- A yoga ball can be a great place to start some gentle movement of the muscles around the pelvis. It works well on days when you are sore and achy and cannot get up and down off the floor. It's also a great place to do some upper body and abdominal strengthening and a nice way to get some feedback for your pelvic floor.

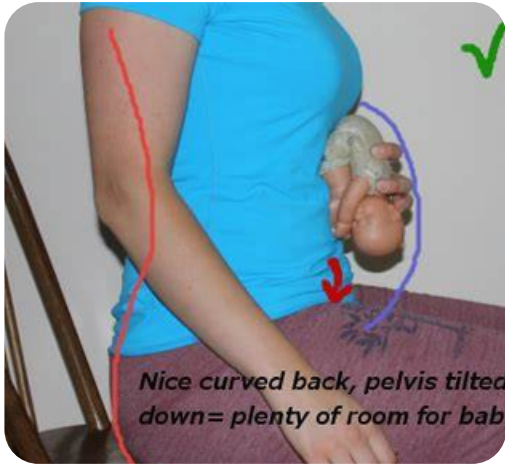


## Clothing

- Make yourself as comfortable as possible by wearing loose fitting clothes ensuring a good fitting bra to support those enlarged breasts.

# Positioning

## Sitting



- When you sit, try to sit tall, drop your shoulders and imagine a helium balloon coming out the top of your head. Keep your chin level with the floor and keep the back of the neck long.
- If you sit all day in work speak to your employer about an ergonomic assessment and see what additional supports in terms of back supports may be potentially available to you or if you are working for home, try to make sure you are sitting in good postures.



- Be mindful of how you sit at home in the evenings, especially if you are sore towards the end of the day. While the sofa may look inviting, try not to spend too much time slouched in it without moving.
- Vary your seating position, prop yourself up with pillows for support or spend a little time on your yoga ball to loosen out your hips and pelvis if you have been sitting all day.

## Sleeping

- Try placing a pillow under your waist – all the way through so you are actually lying over it, not just propping something under your bump at the front. Lie on the less painful side while sleeping.
- A pillow between the knees gives comfort to some people but not to all. It is not essential and if it doesn't make you feel better then get rid of it! 'Listen to your own body' is your good advice. It may of course be that your pillow is slightly too big or slightly too small – try various sizes until you feel comfortable.
- We generally recommend trying to keep your knees, hips and ankles in line and supported by pillows as you sleep but if you find something else that works, then follow what works for you!



# Exercises

Click on the icon to access our exercise playlist



## Arm Opening

- Lying on your side.
- Breathe in and reach the upper arm forward and up.
- Breathe out as you bring the arm back and over behind your back.
- Pause for a second, breathe in and bring the arm up and forward, breathing out as you return to the starting position
- Do not force it. Follow your hand with your eyes



## Cat and Cow stretch

- Kneeling on all fours, hand under your shoulders and knees under your hips
- Inhale to prepare
- As you exhale engage your lower abdominal muscles and arch your back up towards the ceiling with your tailbone and head down. Try to stretch out any areas of the spine that are stiff
- Press your hands in to the floor and feel the stretch extend in to your upper back and shoulder blades
- Slowly return to start position



## Child's Pose

- Kneeling on all 4s
- Bring bum back to heels
- Walk hands out in front until you feel a comfortable stretch in your lower back
- Hold for 30s



## Yoga Ball

- a. Rolling backwards and forward – this is a pelvic tilt modified on the ball
- b. Rolling side to side – nice for loosening out the hips
- c. Circles
- d. Figure 8s

### e. Upper Body strengthening

- Using small weights or a tin of beans combined with tummy strengthening
- You could try some gentle chest press, bicep curls, front raises lateral raises or overhead press

### f. Overhead stretch

- Raise your right arm over your head and feel a comfortable stretch down the right hand side of your body. Think of lifting each rib up away from the lower one.
- Breathe in / out and return to a tall seated position. Hold for 10s

### g. Toe taps

- Lift your right heel from the ground slowly (you can progress to lifting the toes if steady)
- Try to keep your weight centered and don't lean from side to side

### h. Fitball rotations

- Lift both arms overhead and breathing out, take both arms to one side of your hip
- Keep both hips facing forward throughout the movement as you look over your shoulder
- Release and raise both arms overhead as you breathe in and repeat to the other side



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# HEALTHY BODIES AFTER BIRTH

An information session on caring and reconnecting with your body as it recovers after birth

Topics include:

- Bladder & Bowel Care
- Abdominal Care
- Pelvic Floor Advice
- Returning to Movement
- and more!

Every Friday at 11am

Online



Physiotherapist led information session  
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