

## A HEALTHY BACK

As your body changes and pregnancy progresses, back pain is a common symptom you might experience. It is not unusual, and it varies from woman to woman. Sometimes the pain is dull and steady. Some women experience intense, and short-lived pain. Women who experience back pain during pregnancy, or after the birth of their baby, should keep their doctor informed. A referral to a physical therapist may be recommended to help guide you through exercises and stretches best suited for you.

Often, the pain experience is muscle tension, fatigue, or postural strain. The following stretches can be effective to offer relief and improve the symptoms of a backache. They will also help prepare you for labor and delivery.

### CAT-COW STRETCH (also called cat-camel)

This is a simple stretch to start with, moving gently and slowly. This exercise strengthens and stretches the muscles of your back and core and improves blood flow in your spine. The breathing and movement of this exercise will help you relax and ease some of the day's stress.

- Start on your hands and knees as shown. Keep your abdominal muscles hugging your spine throughout the exercise.
- Cat - Exhale & Round - slowly tuck your tailbone, rounding your spine as you drop your head and gaze at your torso.
- Cow (Camel) - Inhale & Arch - slowly tilt your pelvis back so that your tailbone sticks up. Let the movement ripple up your spine so your neck is the last thing to move. Gaze gently upward toward the ceiling without cranking your neck. Repeat 10 times.
- Hold each position for about 10-15 seconds and repeat up to five times.



### CHILD'S POSE

This restful pose gently lengthens and stretches the spine and can relieve low back pain, and shoulder, neck, and hip strain.

- Begin on all fours. Sit your hips back while reaching your arms overhead and lowering your chest to the ground. Hold this position as you breathe normally.
- You can rest your forehead on a yoga block to allow more room for your growing belly.
- Hold child's pose 5-7 breaths. Use your hands to return to an upright position.

### STANDING BACK EXTENSION

This exercise is great to do anytime during pregnancy, not just with pain. It can strengthen lower back muscles and offer relief of posture stress if you sit for long periods of time.

- While standing, place your hands at the back of your hips to offer support and gently arch your back, letting your hips drift forward. ms relaxed.
- Hold for 3-5 seconds, repeat 3-5 times.



## A HEALTHY BACK (CONT.)

### SEATED PIRIFORMIS STRETCH

This stretch can give much-needed relief for sciatic area pain and achiness. Pain may occur as the sciatic nerve passes out of the pelvis and into the leg, traveling out beneath the piriformis muscle, causing possible irritation of the nerve in this area. It often feels worse with prolonged sitting, standing, or bending.

- Sit on a chair and scoot toward the edge of the seat. Cross your leg over the knee of your other leg as shown in the picture. Place your hand on your knee to keep it still,
- While keeping your back tall and straight, gently lean forward until you feel a stretch in your buttock (of the leg that is bent).
- Hold the stretch for 15-30 seconds, then repeat on the other side.



### CHEST STRETCH FOR MID-BACK PAIN

Soreness in the mid-back is due to the changes of the body associated with pregnancy. It can also come from posture stress, especially from spending too much time at a desk or on a computer. Stretches to open the chest can help.

- Begin by standing in the center of a doorway. With your elbows bent, place your forearms on the sides of the doorway at a 90 degree angle from your sides.
- Take a small step forward without leaning until you feel a stretch in the front of your shoulders. Maintain a gentle stretch and do not shrug your shoulders.
- Hold for 10-15 seconds. Step back and repeat 2-3 times.



### STANDING QUADRATUS LUMBORUM STRETCH

The quadratus lumborum is the deepest abdominal muscle, located in your lower back on either side of the lumbar spine. Pain is felt as tightness or discomfort in the lower back region. Stretching this area can help with pain.

- Stand in an open doorway. Raise your arms and bend to the side, keeping your elbow straight.
- Move your outside foot behind you, and slide your hands down as your body bends sideways into a comfortable stretch.
- Relax into the stretch and hold it for 20-30 seconds, while contracting the core muscles on the other side. Slowly ease back up, and repeat on the opposite side.

