

For patients: Advice for women who have symphysis pubis dysfunction during and after pregnancy

What is symphysis pubis dysfunction?

The symphysis pubis is 'the point at which the two halves of your pelvic bones meet at the front'.

In every pregnancy, there is a natural increase in the width of the symphysis pubis caused by changes in your hormones. However, some women will experience during their pregnancy (from 12 weeks onwards), during labour or following delivery, a range of painful symptoms caused by abnormal function in this joint. These symptoms might start suddenly or increase slowly.

Where is the pain typically felt?

Women who have symphysis pubis dysfunction usually experience pain in one or more of the following areas: in the pubic region (this can be extremely tender), in the groin and/or in the inner thigh. The pain can be on one or both sides and frequently is accompanied by pain in the back or lower abdomen. This pain can be mild to severe and can be made worse by walking (a 'waddling' gait is typical) and all weight-bearing activities, particularly those that include lifting one leg (eg going up stairs) or parting the legs. Some women can also feel (and hear) a 'clicking' or grinding in the affected joint.

How will I know if I have this problem?

If you are experiencing any of the symptoms outlined above, do speak to your midwife or doctor. There are things you can do to ease the discomfort, and early intervention can prevent longer-term problems.

What can I do to help the symptoms?

There are a number of things you can do to prevent the pain and ease any discomfort:

- **Listen to your body.** If you know a particular activity aggravates or causes discomfort, try to avoid or stop the activity, For example you might avoid:
Strenuous exercise;
Prolonged standing;
Vacuum cleaning;
Stretching exercises;
Squatting.
- **Brace your pelvic floor muscles:** Before you have to perform any activity that you think might cause you pain, brace your pelvic floor muscles. This action can help support your pelvis and prevent pain.
- **Rest your pelvis:** Whenever possible, take the weight of your body off your pelvis. For example, if you are lying on your side, you might find it more comfortable if you lean your top leg on one or two pillows.
- **Sit down** for tasks that you would normally stand for (eg preparing food, ironing, dressing).
- **Avoid lifting and carrying:** Only do essential lifting (eg carrying a toddler); the more you carry, the more strain on the pelvis. If you have to carry a toddler, you can try to encourage him/her to climb up to your level if possible, which will reduce the lifting you have to do.
- **Avoid stepping over things** eg safety gates, toys - try walking around them.

Compiled by physiotherapists working from Addenbrooke's NHS Trust, Cambridge City Primary Care Trust (PCT) and South Cambridgeshire PCT

- **Avoid straddle movements** especially when weight bearing. Keep your legs together for movements such as getting into a car or into a bath. For this reason, it might be more comfortable to shower rather than bathe. Do not sit astride a bidet, but sit on it like a toilet. Bend your knees and keep your legs 'glued together' when you are turning in bed and getting in and out of bed. In bed, you might find it more comfortable if you place a pillow between your legs.
- **Try aquanatal.** Many pools now run aquanatal classes, which are usually run by qualified midwives. Remember to tell her about your condition. Avoid the breaststroke because this stresses your pelvis.
- **Avoid twisting movements of the body**, always face what you are doing.
- **Elbow crutches:** If the pain is very severe, you might find that using elbow crutches will help take the weight off the pelvis and keep you relatively mobile. If you think you might benefit from these, ask your midwife or physiotherapist.

Where else can I go for help in the Cambridge area?

For further help with this condition, the Women's Health physiotherapists run a drop-in clinic on the first and third Tuesday of every month at 1330 hrs in the Parentcraft Room of the Rosie Maternity Hospital at Addenbrooke's NHS Trust. To confirm it is being held, please ring the Rosie Reception on the day of the clinic Tel: 01223 217 617.