

Coccyx pain during pregnancy (antenatal)

This leaflet is designed to help you if you are experiencing coccyx (base of spine) pain during pregnancy.

What is the coccyx and why do I have pain?

The coccyx (tailbone) is a small triangular bone at the base of your spine that consists of 3-5 vertebrae.

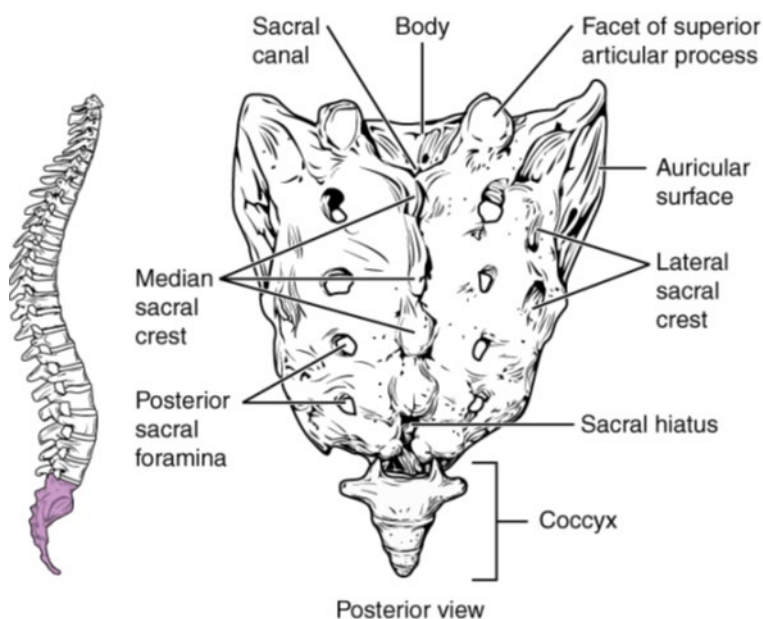
The coccyx is attached to the sacrum/base of the spine by various ligaments and the 'levator ani' muscle (part of your pelvic floor muscles).

Coccyx pain or 'coccydynia' is a rare condition that affects women five times more than men.

During pregnancy your posture is altered and your pelvis tilts forwards due to the growing weight of baby. This additional weight can tilt your pelvis forwards which can pull on your coccyx.

Additionally, any trauma/fall onto buttocks/coccyx or repetitive micro trauma, for example from inadequate sitting posture or sports such as cycling can cause coccyx pain. Pregnancy can also exacerbate any previous injuries of the coccyx.

Most women find standing up from sitting uncomfortable and find that moving around helps.



What makes the coccyx pain worse?

- Prolonged sitting, especially on a hard surface
- Bending
- Lifting
- Climbing stairs
- Opening bowels

How can I manage my pain?

- Using specific coccyx cushions (U shaped) or gel cushions to relieve pressure on the coccyx. Try to use this cushion every time you sit down.
- Avoid sitting for prolonged periods.
- Postural correction – adequate sitting and standing posture can help to alleviate pressure on the coccyx.

- Ensure you sit on an appropriate cushion with your back supported and your feet flat on the ground. Your weight should be on your sitting bones underneath your buttocks. Do not sit slumped. You may find a rolled-up towel or small pillow in the lower curve of your spine gives you extra support.
- When standing, try to tilt your pelvis into neutral alignment (tuck your coccyx/bottom in). Do not let your bottom/back arch backwards.
- Always stand and walk tall with your shoulders relaxed.
- Ensure the surface you are working at is the right height for you, both at work and at home.
- Try to sleep on your side with pillows for support if needed - try a pillow between your legs and one under bump. If you normally prefer to lie on your back, you can roll a duvet up lengthways behind you to turn back onto slightly.
- Adjust how you get in and out of bed – try to roll onto your side and push yourself up, rather than sitting up directly onto the coccyx.
- Using ice – wrap ice pack/frozen peas in a tea towel and place on the painful area for 10-20 minutes. Can be used up to three times a day if required.
- Stool softening medication if pain is aggravated by bowel movements – visit your GP for advice.
- When shopping or carrying bags, ensure you carry the weight evenly in each hand.
- Avoid carrying your toddler on one hip, try and alternate.
- Avoid lifting heavy objects. When you have to lift, bend your knees not your back and keep the object close to you.
- When doing activities such as dressing, do not stand on one leg. Sit down to do these tasks.
- Avoid twisting movements, especially when lifting.
- Wear flat, supportive shoes.
- Take the stairs one at a time; try leading with your less painful leg when going up, and when going downstairs, lead with your more painful leg. OR you can go up and down the stairs sideways, again leading with your less painful leg.
- Be as active as possible within your pain limits and avoid activities that make your pain worse.
- Physiotherapy and exercises.

Before the birth

Think about birthing positions that are comfortable for you. Record these in your birth plan. Consider a labour and birth in water – this allows you to move freely and change position.

During labour

Use gravity to help the baby to move downwards by staying as upright as possible, such as kneeling, on all fours, or standing.

You may be able to lie on your side for internal examinations – ask your midwife or doctor to consider this.

After the birth

- After the birth it is important to continue to follow the advice, even if the pain has reduced, in order to avoid straining the pelvis.
- Take prescribed pain relief.
- Listen to your body and move within your pain limits.
- Accept help with caring for your baby and family.
- Gradually increase your activity as you feel able.
- Change nappies on a surface at waist height.
- Do not lift your baby too often.
- Carry your baby in front of you. You may find a sling or baby carrier helpful for this.
- Do not carry your baby on one hip
- Kneel at the bath side rather than leaning over.
- Lower the cot-side when lifting or lowering your baby.
- Keep your baby close to you when moving them in and out of a car seat.
- If you have to carry baby in a car seat, hold it in front of you, not on your hip.
- Do your pelvic floor exercises every day.

Physiotherapy for coccyx pain

A physiotherapist can advise on postural corrections and teach you exercises to help strengthen the muscles supporting your coccyx and lower back/pelvis.

Exercises

The pelvic floor muscles run from the pubic bone at the front to the coccyx at the back. Pelvic floor exercises can help to relieve coccyx pain. It is also important to be able to relax your pelvic floor.

Try to find a position that does not aggravate your pain – for example, lying on your side or sitting on an adequate cushion. You can do your pelvic floor exercises lying on your back with your knees bent, as long as there is no discomfort.

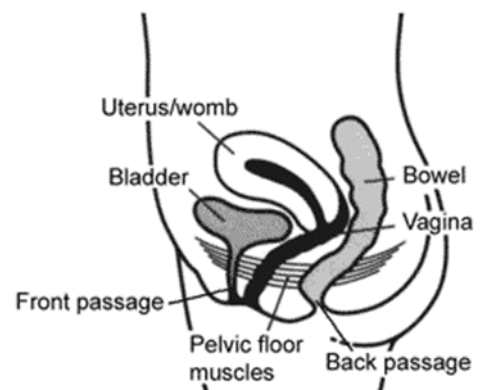
Why do I need to relax my pelvic floor muscles?

It is very important to be able to fully relax your pelvic floor muscles as well as being able to contract them.

If the muscles are already stiff and tense, it is very difficult to contract them effectively and build strength, so your pelvic floor exercises will not make as much difference.

You may feel as though you are not tightening your muscles enough if you have a tight pelvic floor.

Full relaxation of your pelvic floor muscles is essential to allow the passing of urine and faeces.



What problems can having a tight pelvic floor cause?

- Constipation and pain when passing stools or having a feeling of incomplete emptying of bowels.
- Bladder pain.
- Urinary urgency and incontinence.
- Incomplete bladder emptying.
- Pain or discomfort on sexual intercourse.
- Stress incontinence – sometimes your pelvic floor can be tight on one side only, and this can cause opening of the sphincter muscles which causes leaking on coughing, sneezing, running, laughing etc.

How do I relax my pelvic floor muscles?

Lie down with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed (crook lying). Alternatively, you can complete this exercise sitting in a comfortable and supported position, but you might find this more difficult to start with.

Listen to your breathing. You may notice your stomach rising as you breathe in. This is called diaphragmatic breathing.

Then follow these three steps:

- a) Breathe into your stomach so that it rises up. You can place your hands on your stomach to feel the stomach rising. Hold your breath for 4-5 seconds, making sure to keep your shoulders relaxed and your ribcage soft.
- b) While you are holding your breath, imagine your pelvis getting wider, consciously relax your tummy downwards and relax your pelvic floor muscles from front to back opening (e.g. as if you are passing urine, opening your vaginal muscles as if using a dilator and as if opening your bowels. You could also use the image of a rosebud opening, until you feel them soften. Remember that this is NOT an active push; you are trying to 'let go' of all the muscles instead.
- c) Then 'sigh' the breath out, with an open mouth as if steaming up a window. This should be completely passive in nature.

The above technique does require lots of practice and concentration to begin with. Once you are able to do this consistently, incorporate it into your pelvic floor muscle training by **relaxing your pelvic floor muscles on the in-breath, and contracting them on the out-breath**. If you are doing slow contractions, remember to take normal breaths in between each contraction.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

Exercise 1 'Slow ones' (these also help with urge incontinence and urgency)

- You should begin exercising your pelvic floor lying on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the bed.
- Tighten the back passage as if trying to hold in wind and then bring this contraction forward as if trying to hold in a tampon or stop urine.
- Do not use your tummy or buttock muscles when doing this exercise. You should not see any external movement.

- Aim to hold this contraction for 3-5 seconds. Build up strength within your pelvic floor until you can hold for 10 seconds.
- Keep breathing throughout and then relax your pelvic floor for at least 6 seconds in between each contraction.

Exercise 2 'Quick ones' (these can also help with stress incontinence)

- You should begin exercising your pelvic floor lying on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the bed.
- Tighten the muscles as above.
- Hold for 1 second and relax for 1 second. Repeat 10 times.

Repeat each exercise (slow and fast) 10 times, 3-4 times a day.

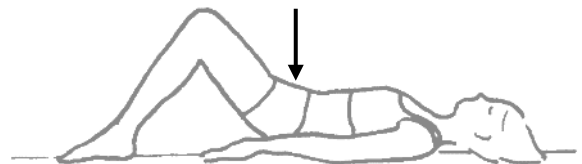
Other exercises that may help

Buttocks squeezes:

- Lying or sitting, squeeze your buttocks together.
- Hold for 10 seconds and relax. Repeat 10 times.

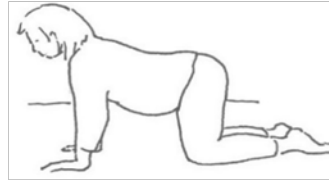
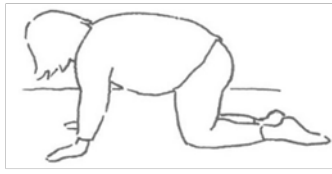
Transversus abdominis:

- Start lying down with knees bent and feet resting on the bed.
- Take a breath in, and then as you breathe out gently draw your lower abdomen in towards your spine.
- Try to hold this, while continuing to breathe, and then relax.
- Try to increase the hold until you can hold for the count of 10 and repeat 10 times;
- Always draw these muscles in to support you when you are doing any abdominal exercises and in any activity involving your back e.g. lifting anything, including your baby; rising from sitting; getting out of bed; and bending over. This is another good habit for life.



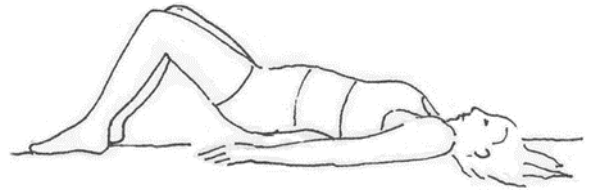
Pelvic tilting:

- Start lying down with knees bent and feet resting on the bed, draw in your lower abdomen.
- At the same time tuck your tailbone under, flattening the curve of your lower back.
- Keep breathing while holding this position for a few moments and then relax.
- This exercise can be done at any time and is also very good for easing an aching back. Alternatively, you can complete this exercise in the position detailed below:
- Start lying down with knees bent and feet resting on the bed, draw in your lower abdomen, as in exercise 1. (You can also do this exercise in standing, against a door, or on hands and knees.)
- At the same time tuck your tailbone under, flattening the curve of your lower back.
- Keep breathing while holding this position for a few moments and then relax.
- This exercise can be done at any time and is also very good for easing an aching back.



Bridging:

- Start lying down with knees bent and feet resting on the bed, draw in your lower abdomen and tilt pelvis, as in exercise 1+2.
- Lift your bottom into the air and hold.
- Hold for 3-5 seconds and increase this to 10 seconds as able.



The clam:

- Lying on your side with knees and heels together.
- Lift the top leg off the other without rocking backwards and keeping heels together.
- Repeat 10 times each



Hamstring stretch:

- Sit/stand with your leg stretched and point your toes up towards the ceiling.
- Lean forwards over your straight leg. You should feel a stretch down the back of your leg.
- Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat each side 3 times.



Where to find more information

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/coccydinia/Pages/Causes.aspx

www.coccyx.org/

Women's Health Physiotherapy Department

Royal Berkshire Hospital

London Road, Reading RG1 5AN

Tel: 0118 322 7818.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Women's Health Physiotherapy, July 2020

Reviewed: December 2022. Next review due: December 2024

Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent