

Back pain is one of the most common discomforts during pregnancy. As your baby grows during pregnancy, your uterus expands to as much as 1,000 times its original size. This amount of growth—centered in one area—affects the balance of your body and may cause discomfort. This pamphlet explains the causes of backache during pregnancy and offers tips for what you can do to ease the pain.

What Causes Back Pain

Back pain in pregnancy has many possible causes. It usually is caused by strain on the back muscles. In midpregnancy, when your uterus becomes heavier, it changes your center of gravity. You then slowly begin to change your posture and the ways that you move. Most women begin to lean backward in the later months of pregnancy—making their back muscles work harder.

Weakness of the abdominal muscles can also cause back pain. The abdominal muscles normally support the spine and play an important role in the health of the back. The hormones of pregnancy cause the muscles to relax and become loose. This may cause some back pain. It can also make you more prone to injury when you exercise.

What You Can Do

To help prevent or ease back pain, try to be aware of how you stand, sit, and move. Here are some tips that may help:

- Wear low-heeled (but not flat) shoes with good arch support.
- Ask for help when lifting heavy objects.
- When standing for long periods, place one foot on a stool or box.
- If your bed is too soft, have someone help you place a board between the mattress and box spring.
- Don't bend over from the waist to pick things up—squat down, bend your knees, and keep your back straight.
- Sit in chairs with good back support, or use a small pillow behind the low part of your back.
- Try to sleep on your side with one or two pillows between your legs for support.
- Apply heat or cold to the painful area or massage it.

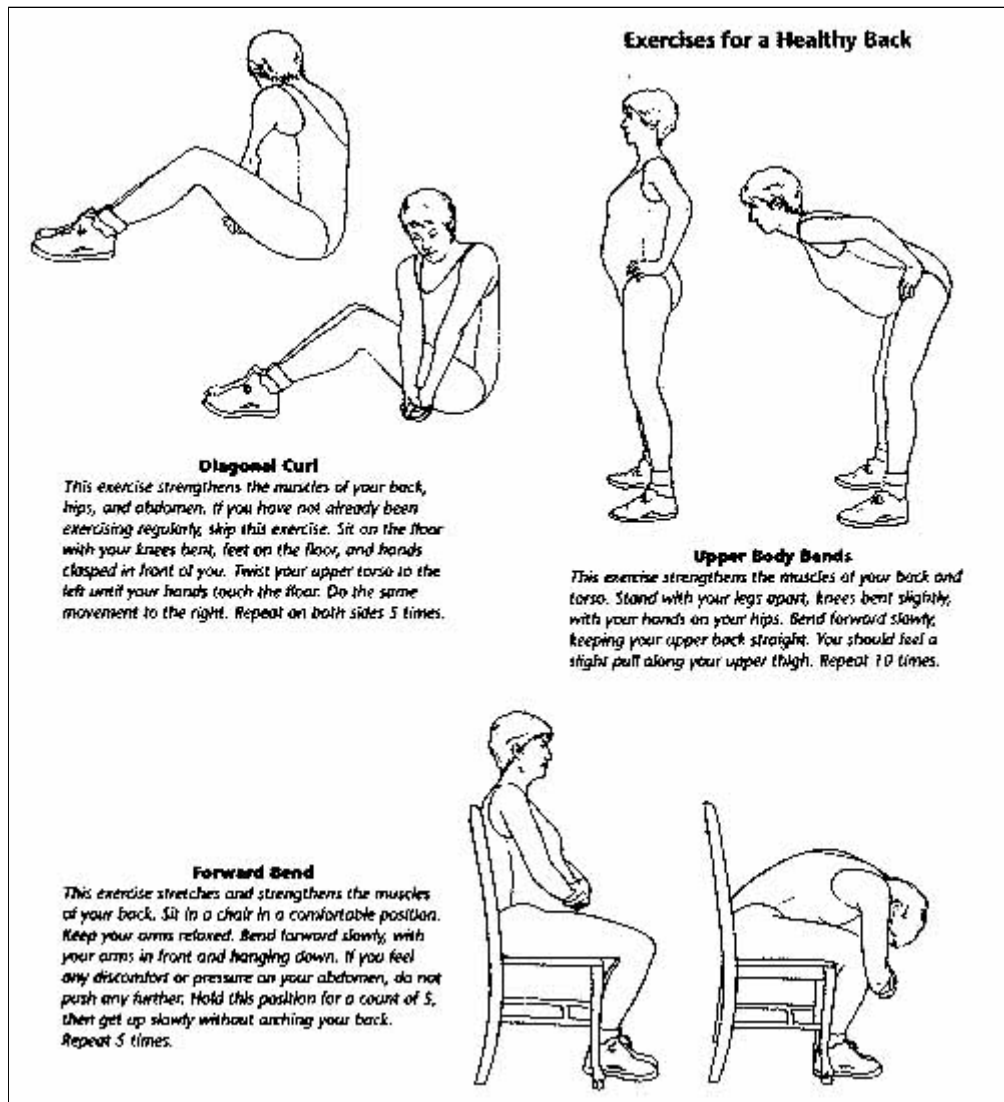
Doing special exercises for the back can also help lessen backache. They can help strengthen and stretch muscles that support the back and legs and promote good posture—keeping the muscles of the back, the abdomen, the hips, and the upper body strong. These exercises not only will help ease back pain but also will help prepare you for labor and delivery.

If back pain continues to be a problem, your doctor may suggest that you wear a maternity girdle, special elastic sling, or back brace. These devices help support the weight of your abdomen and ease the tension on your back. On rare occasions, mild pain medications, bed rest, or physical therapy may be suggested by your doctor.

Don't try to treat yourself. Back pain can also be caused by other problems. Back pain is one of the main symptoms of preterm labor. If it continues or gets worse, call your doctor. You should also call your doctor if you are having fever, burning during urination, or vaginal bleeding.

Finally...

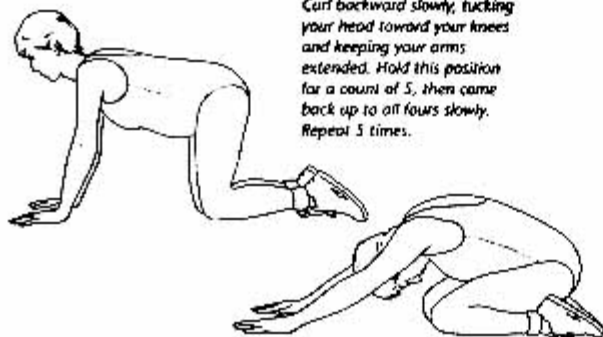
During pregnancy your body will go through many changes. Some of these changes may cause discomfort. This is normal. Backache is one of the most common complaints during pregnancy. However, if you follow the tips given here and do exercises to strengthen your muscles, you can ease some of the pain.



A Healthy Back (continued)

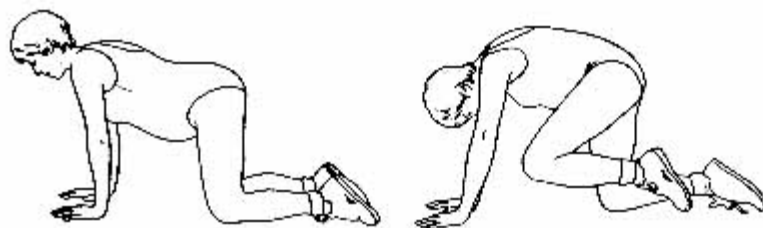
Backward Stretch

This exercise stretches and strengthens the muscles of your back, pelvis, and thighs. Kneel on hands and knees, with your knees 8-10 inches apart and your arms straight (hands under your shoulders). Curl backward slowly, tucking your head toward your knees and keeping your arms extended. Hold this position for a count of 5, then come back up to all fours slowly. Repeat 5 times.



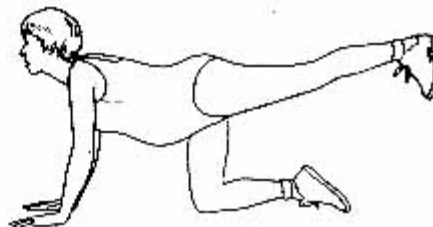
Back Press

This exercise strengthens the muscles of your back, torso, and upper body and promotes good posture. Stand with your feet 10-12 inches away from a wall and your back against it. Press the lower part of your back against the wall. Hold this position for a count of 10, then release. Repeat 10 times.



Leg Lift Crawl

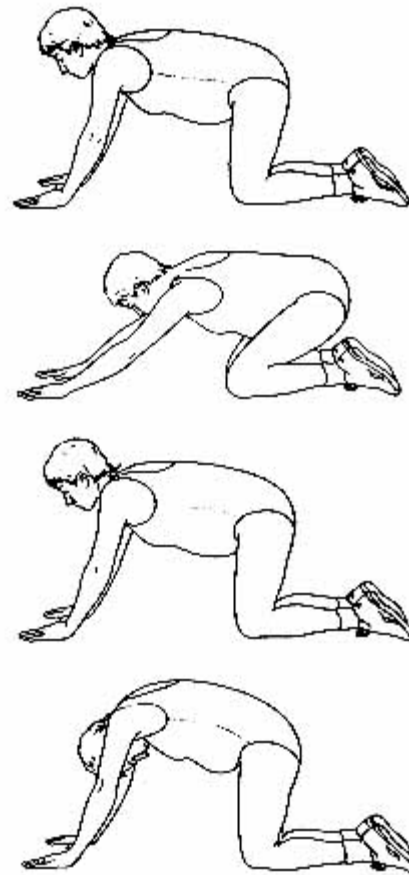
This exercise strengthens the muscles of your back and abdomen. Kneel on hands and knees, with your weight distributed evenly and your arms straight (hands under your shoulders). Lift your left knee and bring it toward your elbow. Straighten your leg without locking your knee. Extend your leg up and back. Do this exercise to a count of 5. Move slowly; don't fling your leg back or arch your back. Repeat on both sides 5-10 times.





Trunk Twist

This exercise stretches the muscles of your back, spine, and upper torso. Sit on the floor with your legs crossed, with your left hand holding your left foot and your right hand on the floor at your side for support. Slowly twist your upper torso to the right. Do the same movement to the left, after switching your hands (right hand holding right foot and left hand supporting you). Repeat on both sides 5-10 times.



Rocking Back Arch

This exercise stretches and strengthens the muscles of your back, hips, and abdomen. Kneel on hands and knees, with your weight distributed evenly and your back straight. Rock back and forth, to a count of 5. Return to the original position and curl your back upward as much as you can. Repeat 5-10 times.