

Pregnancy and Chiropractic

By Dr. Robert DeVincentis

Why would a pregnant mom need a chiropractic physician? Is it safe for my baby and me to have chiropractic adjustments while I'm pregnant? When should a pregnant mom start seeing a chiropractic physician? These are some very common questions that many women have and need to be answered.

Pregnancy is extremely hard on the lower back as well as on the neck and middle back area. Look at the spine of an expectant mother from the side and it's easy to understand why they may be in pain. During pregnancy, there is an increased development of breast tissue that will cause the shoulders to round forward and place a tremendous amount of pressure on the neck and upper back area. The weight of the growing fetus in the mother's womb puts the lower back in a hyperlordotic position or in a type of swayback position. This type of position may put the mother in an uncomfortable or even painful state.

During pregnancy there are many obvious hormonal changes that occur. One of those changes is an increase production of a hormone called relaxin that is designed to loosen and relax the ligaments that hold and stabilize the lower back and pelvis. This is one way the body prepares for labor, but may have a detrimental effect to the mother in the months leading up to the labor. The ligaments that are now looser will cause the spine and pelvis to misalign more easily. When these misalignments or subluxations occur, the mother may experience a good amount of pain. During the last two trimesters, the pelvis will rotate down in the front and will cause the lower back muscles to become shorter and in a constant contracted state, which will ultimately cause an increase of pressure on the sensitive joints of the lower back.

One misconception many maternity clinics and even patients have about lower back pain and pregnancy is that it is just a **normal** occurrence. Many patients who are pregnant will complain about pain in the lower back to their doctor and will get a response that it is just normal pain associated with pregnancy. This does not have to be the case. There is no such thing as normal pain. Pain is the body's natural way of warning you that something is wrong. The pain should be addressed in a proper way and eliminated if possible. Leg numbness or sciatica is another common misconception patients may have during pregnancy.

For some reason many of my patients will tell me they have leg numbness or pain because the baby is pressing on a nerve!?! This simply just does not happen. If you look at the anatomy of the mother's uterus and its exact location in reference to the lumbar nerve roots or sciatic nerve you will realize that this is a nearly impossible occurrence.

Drugless Approach to Your Health

Since nearly all drugs and medications may cause fetal damage or malformations, it is important for the mother to avoid them as much as possible. Chiropractic care does not involve the use of any drugs in its practice. This is just one of the many reasons why chiropractic is utilized so much during pregnancy.

Is Chiropractic Safe For My Baby and Me?

The answer is absolutely YES! Doctors of chiropractic are the only doctors that are trained to detect and correct spinal subluxations. A chiropractic physician in Florida has to have a minimum of eight years of education and pass rigid national and state licensing exams prior to entering in private practice. Like many chiropractic physicians, I like to use a specific table that is designed specifically for the pregnant patient. Techniques used on pregnant mothers are altered to allow more comfort to the mom. Patients that are pregnant are a lot easier to do a spinal adjustment on than your average patient mainly because of the secretion of the hormone relaxin which will relax all ligaments that connect the spine and pelvis together. One study by the famous orthopedist Pertag Freitag, M.D. showed that women who received chiropractic care during pregnancy had safer deliveries because the need for painkillers during pregnancy was decreased by 50 percent. 1.

Will I Need a Referral From My Primary Doctor or OBGYN to See a Chiropractic Physician?

Florida state law mandates that health insurance companies allow direct access to a chiropractic physician. In other words, you do not need a referral to see a chiropractic physician; they are considered primary care physicians. Nearly all insurance companies now cover chiropractic medicine, even Medicaid and HMO's.

Chiropractic care during pregnancy enhances a mother's pregnancy and actually can make the special time an enjoyable one. When a mother goes into labor already in pain, that pain usually intensifies and can result in complications. If you want an uncomplicated labor and delivery, certain steps should be taken. If your spine is flexible and working properly you will have less chance for complications. If you are exercising and eating healthy you also can avoid complications. If you mentally prepare yourself for the labor and delivery you can lower your complication rate. A technique that I highly recommend is the Bradley Technique that offers the best approach for preparation of labor and delivery. I also recommend having a Doula and midwife to be present at your birth.

There are numerous Bradley instructors in the Jacksonville area and offer classes throughout the year. To get a list of Bradley instructors, doulas, or midwives please call or e-mail my office. If you desire natural or home childbirth these caring professionals are a must. Pregnancy, labor and delivery should be a wonderful and uplifting experience, not an experience that was either never remembered or that gives a bad feeling.

References:

1: Freitag, Per. (1987, May). Expert testimony of Pertag, M.D., Ph.D., comparing the results of two neighboring hospitals. U.S. District Court, Northern Illinois Eastern Division, No. 76 C 3777.

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