

Coccyx pain during pregnancy and after the birth of your baby

What is the coccyx?

The coccyx (tailbone) is a small triangular bone at the base of your spine.

Causes of coccyx pain

- During pregnancy your posture changes and your pelvis tilts forwards due to the growing weight of the baby. This additional weight can be a cause of 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.
- Previous accidents or injuries i.e. trauma/fall onto buttocks/coccyx
- Some women only develop coccyx pain after the birth of their baby. This could be due to pressure on the coccyx as the baby is born. Prolonged sitting to feed the baby could also lead to coccyx pain.

What makes coccyx pain worse?

- Prolonged sitting, especially on a hard surface
- Bending
- Lifting
- Climbing stairs
- Constipation/straining when opening bowels

How can I manage my pain?

- Avoid sitting for prolonged periods.
- Postural adjustments – improve your posture in both sitting and standing posture can help to reduce pressure on the coccyx.
 - ◆ Try to sit upright with your back supported
 - ◆ Use a coccyx cushion
 - ◆ When standing, try to tilt your pelvis into neutral alignment (tuck your coccyx/bottom in). Do not let your bottom/back arch backwards.
 - ◆ Always try to stand and walk in an upright posture with your shoulders relaxed.

- Try to sleep on your side using pillows for support. Try placing a pillow between your legs.
- 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.
- **Ice** – The use of ice can help with pain and inflammation. Use crushed ice cubes or a bag of frozen peas. Protect the skin from an ice burn by placing the ice pack in a wet towel. Leave in place for 10-15 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish. It's normal for the skin to become pink with either heat or ice, however if you experience discomfort or a burning sensation remove the item immediately. Don't apply heat or ice packs if you have poor skin sensation or poor circulation, if you are diabetic or over areas of infection.
- Laxatives/stool softening medication if pain is aggravated by bowel movements – visit your GP or pharmacist for advice.
- Avoid carrying your child on one side, try to hold them in a central position or change sides regularly.
- Avoid lifting heavy objects. When you do have to lift, bend your knees not your back and keep the object close to your body.
- Wear flat, supportive shoes.
- 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. During labour, try to use gravity to help the baby to move downwards by staying in upright positions, such as kneeling, on all fours, or standing.

After the birth

- After the birth it is important to continue to follow the advice in this leaflet.
- 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.
- Do your pelvic floor exercises every day.

Exercises

Pelvic floor exercises

The pelvic floor is like a hammock/sling suspended from inside the front of your pelvis to the coccyx. These muscles are very important as they support the pelvic organs in position and prevent leakage from the bladder and bowel. These muscles are also weakened in pregnancy and childbirth.

The Basic Pelvic Floor Exercise

Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine. The feeling is one of “squeeze and lift”, closing and drawing-up the back and the front passages. This is called a pelvic floor contraction.

There are two ways to work them:

1. Hold for up to a maximum of 10 seconds and repeat up to 10 times.
2. Squeeze and lift, then let go quickly. Again, repeat up to 10 times.

Try to exercise the pelvic floor 3 times a day either in sitting, standing or lying. (Practicing them whilst feeding your baby can help you remember to do these). Each time you exercise, the muscles become stronger and more supportive. You should also contract them before lifting and coughing.

Transversus abdominis (deep tummy muscles)

Take a breath in, and then as you breathe out gently draw in your abdominal muscles below your tummy button (imagine you are taking in a notch on a low-slung belt).

Hold this for several seconds whilst breathing normally.

Repeat 5-10 times resting between each pull-in.

Try to do this exercise several times a day in sitting, side lying or standing.

Most importantly remember to tighten this muscle when you lift anything including your baby, when changing position (e.g. getting out of bed) and when pushing the pram. This muscle works with the pelvic floor muscles, so you could exercise them together.

Pelvic Tilt

Pelvic tilt is an exercise that allows you to help find your neutral pelvic position. This is the position that provides equal weight distribution and allows more effective engagement of your pelvic muscles. It can be done in different positions as demonstrated on next page.

1. Sitting

Sit tall on a chair or ball with your feet flat on the floor.

Slowly roll the ball toward your heels and tuck your tailbone under to tilt your pelvis posteriorly.

Hold the position for a few seconds, then roll the ball back to the starting position to bring the pelvis to neutral.



2. Hands and knees

Start on all four with the knees under your hips and hands under your shoulders.

Inhale, then gently round your back just like a cat while you exhale slowly.

Inhale as you return to neutral.



Web address:

<http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/patient-careinformation/>

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