

# Rib Pain in Pregnancy

## What is rib pain?

Rib pain can be felt on one or both sides. Often the pain can be under the breast or on the side of your chest towards the bottom of your rib cage. The pain can sometimes radiate to your back. It is most common in the third trimester of your pregnancy (28 weeks onwards).

## What causes rib pain in pregnancy?

Rib pain in pregnancy is very common, and there are lots of possible causes for it.

- As your baby is growing, your abdomen stretches and there will be more pressure on your ribs.
- When the baby changes position, or kicks, you may feel more pain around in your ribs.
- Your breasts are also growing, and this can lead to posture changes where your shoulders may be positioned forwards and down putting a strain onto your back, neck and ribcage.
- As baby grows bigger you may also find yourself out of breath as it is harder to breathe deeply. You may get referred pain into your shoulders from nerves in your diaphragm.
- Heartburn: Pregnancy hormones relax the muscles of the oesophagus (food pipe), and this can cause heartburn and indigestion, which is sometimes felt as rib pain.

## What can I do about rib pain?

### General advice:

- Adjust your posture so that you are not slumped when sitting, and consider using a lumbar support such as a rolled up towel to help you stay sitting upright
- Use a well-fitting, supportive bra.
- If you think your pain is related to heartburn, ask your GP for advice.
- Try heat or ice – ensure you always have a layer between you and the heat/ice and do not place directly over the bump.

- The use of heat can help with pain and muscle relaxation. Use a warm water bottle, or microwavable wheat bag, following the instructions provided when you purchased it. To protect your skin from heat burns, wrap the item in a few layers of towel. Leave in place for 10-15 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish.
- 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

## Exercises

### 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 below;

#### 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.



**Side stretches:** these can be done in sitting. Simply bend down to each side in a pain free range. This will help to gently stretch the side of your body, and reduce the pressure on your ribs.



**Rest position:** kneel on the floor and rest your chest, or arms forwards onto a gym ball or chair. This can help to take the pressure off your ribs and low back.



### **What can I do if the advice/exercises don't improve the pain?**

If you do not feel better after trying the above advice and exercises, speak to your GP about causes of rib pain. If they feel your pain will be improved with physiotherapy, they can refer you to the Women's Health Physiotherapy Service.

## Web Address

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

## QR Code



**If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :**

Physiotherapy Department  
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary  
Telephone: 01484 342434

MSK Physiotherapy Admin Office  
Telephone: 01484 905380

[www.cht.nhs.uk](http://www.cht.nhs.uk)

**If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.**

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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