

## **Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP) - also known as Symphysis Pubic Dysfunction (SPD)**

### **What is it?**

PGP occurs when pelvic ligaments soften in pregnancy due to action of hormones relaxin and progesterone, causing instability in pelvic joints, particularly the pubic symphysis joint (your pubic bone at the front of the pelvis). The growing baby and uterus increase the pressure on these joints, exacerbating symptoms. It occurs in around 25% of all pregnancies (to a greater or lesser degree). Remember it generally eases greatly as soon as the baby is born, and with time will disappear.

### **What to avoid**

- Avoid any movement that involves opening your legs can exacerbate your pain and cause injury.
- Avoid squatting and lunging as these put too much pressure on the pubic bone joint.
- Avoid or limit weight bearing activities through the legs, such as walking (I know you can't totally avoid it, but you can walk slower and walk less far – use buses, get partner to walk dog etc.). Walk with small steps and avoid hills if you can.
- Avoid breast stroke legs when swimming.
- Be very careful when you lift things, and avoid lifting heavy things if at all possible. When lifting or pushing things, apply a small pelvic tilt, drawing tummy muscles in a little and lifting the pelvic floor a little too.
- Avoid pushing shopping trolleys or buggys if you can

### **What can help**

- Rest as much as you can.
- Bed: When getting out of bed, or changing sides during sleep, always keep legs firmly stuck together. If you can afford it, silk sheets and/or PJs are great as you they help with smooth turns. Sleep with something (cushion, pillow, wodge of duvet etc) between your legs and something similar under bump and possible under your waist too.
- Warm baths and warm hot water bottle across lower back can help.
- Swimming can be a relief, as the weight of the baby is taken off the pelvis a little, but avoid breast stroke legs.
- Strengthening the pelvic floor muscles could help as these muscles help to support the pelvis, and its contents (i.e. bladder, bowel and baby!).
- Strengthen the gluteal (bottom) muscles. Try standing and holding the buttock and anal muscles in for a count of five (keep breathing!). Do this five times a day, or more.
- Strengthening the lower abdominal muscles. Try doing pelvic tilts (great to do in the yoga cat stretch) and this will also help by relieving tension in lower back, which can become a problem in people with PGP. Try also sitting on a chair, and holding stomach muscles in a little (as if hugging your baby) for count of five, five times.
- Try also gomukhasana (cow face pose) and dandasana (staff pose).
- Try doing household jobs in a sitting position (e.g. sit on chair for ironing (or consider not doing any ironing – I don't, can you tell?!))
- Consider wearing a support belt around your lower belly (talk to your midwife or doctor)

- Put a plastic bag on seats, especially car seats, to allow you to more easily swing the legs out (keep legs 'glued' together)

### **During labour...**

- In labour, the best positions may include standing, kneeling and all fours (knees no wider than about shoulder width) as the weight of baby is taken off the pubic symphysis bone causing less strain and damage.
- Being in water may help too. However, in severe cases they may not allow it due to delay in climbing out in a potential emergency. In this case, try a bath instead. Many hospitals have large baths in the delivery rooms which you can labour in until just before delivery.
- Remember to tell your midwife (write it in your birth plan) that you have PGP as she will need to be especially careful. Ideally, make sure she (and your birth partner) knows your widest leg limit (measured in advance and remembered using a piece of string) and try to ensure that your legs don't go wider than this during the whole of your labour (and afterwards). Particularly important if epidural has been used as you won't be able to feel your pelvis in the same way.