

Pregnant?

See Your Chiropractor

by O.J. Ressel, BSc, DC

If you have just gone through a pregnancy you have certainly experienced low back pain or discomfort. Most discomfort is caused by the accentuation of the curve in the lower part of your spine and, to a small degree, increased weight gain. This often places pressure on delicate nerves and you may experience pain in the low back, buttocks and/or legs. Some low back pain is caused by the relaxation and stretching of many of the ligaments of the pelvic area. These ligaments are under hormonal control as your body prepares for the birth process. This type of complaint responds very well to chiropractic care.

Another complication of pregnancy is nausea or morning sickness. Some may be caused by increased vitamin D. Some may also be caused by transient or temporary hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). I suggest eating a carbohydrate first thing in the morning, such as wheat toast, before you actually get out of bed. A light snack just before bed will often alleviate many of these transient symptoms. Drinking plenty of water to avoid dehydration and eating smaller amounts of food more often will help you deal with this problem. Many women also find ginger root very helpful. Often an imbalance of the nervous system is the cause, and in this case your chiropractor can correct the subluxation responsible.

Indigestion can be a problem, especially towards the last trimester of your pregnancy, when you're "all baby." The baby tends to squeeze your intestinal area and stomach into very small spaces. That, coupled with the hormone progesterone's effect on the stomach, can cause indigestion and heartburn. Alfalfa or peppermint tea will often help. A visit to your chiropractor should be considered essential to ensure a properly functioning nervous system so that these symptoms are minimized.

Many pregnant women experience constipation and hemorrhoids. Most often, constipation is the result of the actions of progesterone on the entire gastrointestinal tract. Inorganic iron supplements can add to the problem. However it is easy to deal with. Drink more fluids and eat foods that are high in fibre and bulk. Though prune juice may help, it is not what I recommend because of its chemical action on the large intestine. Chiropractors see many patients with constipation because the nerves from the low back area of your spine control your large intestine. We have great success in looking after this type of problem.

Pregnant women often complain of cramps in the legs, most of which are caused by irritation and pressure on the sciatic nerve in the area of the low back. This is where chiropractic can really help a pregnant mom. I recommend walking and stretching the calf muscles to reduce any lactic acid build-up. It is also important to realize that whatever a mother takes in affects her unborn baby. Good nutrition

actually starts before the baby is born and eating a well-balanced diet will supply all the essential nutrients needed for mother, baby and placenta. During pregnancy, the body has an increased appetite and need for protein. After all, these are the baby's building blocks. Remember, the baby is growing at a rate seven times faster than a toddler! If you are a vegetarian, it is important that you get a complete balanced diet so that your baby develops normally.

Weight and Fluid Retention

I remind expectant mothers that you are not fat, you are pregnant! There is a big difference. The latest research indicates that weight gain of 35 lbs or more on a high protein diet is healthy, as long as the diet is well-balanced, limited in refined sugars, and does not contain preservatives.

In the past, women have been told to reduce their salt intake to combat this feeling of "fatness." I would like you to understand that salt is absolutely crucial during pregnancy. It causes you and your baby to have increased blood volume. A reduction of salt can have very dire consequences on the growth of your fetus with the possibility of miscarriage. Use salt to taste and eat generally in accordance with appetite. In other words, eat when you feel like it, not when the clock tells you to. You may think that salt intake increases swelling, but swelling is not a condition to be treated. Some fluid retention is actually very healthy for the fetus and good for mom. It is a temporary and a very normal part of being pregnant.

Nutrition and Supplements

A woman requires at least 800 mg of iron daily during pregnancy, which is crucial for the development of red blood cells in fetal circulation. Iron is fairly easy to obtain, as it is contained in dark leafy vegetables. I also recommend a natural liquid iron supplement from the health food store. Vitamin C helps in the absorption of iron from your digestive tract.

Another very important vitamin for the developing fetus is folic acid. It is crucial in the normal development of the nervous system and is usually contained in foods that also have iron.

Calcium is another very essential

mineral. During pregnancy at least 1200 mg are required daily. While found in dairy foods, calcium is also found in almonds, which can make a nice substitute for milk (see recipes).

Vitamin D makes calcium more readily absorbed from the intestinal area, but be careful, for it can also cause nausea and morning sickness. Generally speaking, vitamin D is best obtained from exposure to sunlight. Watch out for heat build-up, however. It's not good for a developing fetus.

I would also like to caution expecting mothers about taking vitamin B while pregnant. Vitamin B tends to reduce the amount of milk available during breast feeding and should be avoided as a supplement.

Many valuable herbs may be used during pregnancy. For example, red raspberry leaves make a good uterine tonic which helps prevent miscarriage and aids in fighting infections. It also helps with anemia and cramping to a certain degree. Peppermint is also very good. It helps digestion and soothes nausea. So does ginger root. Other herbs such as echinacea and camomile are very relaxing but should be taken in the gentlest way possible, as hot tea.

There are a number of no-nos that should be heeded while you are pregnant. One of them is alcohol. Alcohol crosses the placental barrier very quickly and can cause problems in nervous system development. Caffeine should be avoided, as it has been linked to birth defects. It can be found in coffee, black and green teas, cola drinks and chocolate. As well, avoid foods that are known to have artificial colors or preservatives, including sweeteners and nitrates or nitrites found in hot dogs, luncheon meats and bologna.

Be very cautious with medication. All drugs, whether prescription or over the counter, affect a growing fetus. They will have adverse affects on the growing baby and should be discouraged at all costs. I recommend a visit to a naturopath or herbologist to seek alternatives. I would also recommend that while you're pregnant you exercise on a regular basis, but avoid back extensions and pelvic tilts. Walking or gentle rebounding make for excellent summer exercises and are best for you and baby. ■ Dr Ressel is a chiropractor practicing in Burlington, ON