



**University Hospitals  
Bristol and Weston**  
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information service  
**Maternity physiotherapy**

# Rib pain during pregnancy



## **Rib pain is common during pregnancy, especially in the last trimester**

- Pregnancy hormones relax your ligaments. This loosening can allow your ribs to shift and move in different ways, sometimes causing discomfort.
- Baby is growing and as your abdomen stretches then your ribs also expand.
- Your breasts are also growing, and the extra weight can pull your shoulders 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.
- Pressure on your stomach may cause acid reflux/ indigestion. This can also give rib pain.

### **Important**

If you have pain in your lower back and difficulty peeing, or a burning sensation when you pee, then you may have a urinary tract infection which needs to be checked with your GP.

# Ways to reduce your rib pain

Aim to have good posture both in standing and sitting so you do not squash your ribcage.

- Stand 'tall' with your shoulders back and head up.
- When you are sitting try not to slump down. Put a small cushion or support behind your lower back.

Wear a well fitted bra which gives good support, preferably without an underwire which can dig in your ribs.

## Heat treatment

Warmth can reduce aches and pains. Hot water bottles and wheat packs placed over your ribs may help, but never over your bump.

## Exercises

Try some stretching exercises, as explained below, antenatal yoga can also be useful for some people.

### 1. Deep breathing

Practice deep breathing exercises at regular interval in the day and before bedtime. This will help gently stretch your ribs.

## 2. Sideway stretches

Hold your arms above your head to expand your ribcage and provide temporary relief by lifting your ribs away from your womb.

Bend away from the painful side.

Then take a few deep breathes to fill your lungs and further stretch the muscles between your ribs.

Return to the starting position.

Repeat five to ten times.

You could try this exercise by sitting sideways on a chair as shown below. Put a cushion/ small pillow over the back of the chair for comfort.



### 3. Modified child's pose

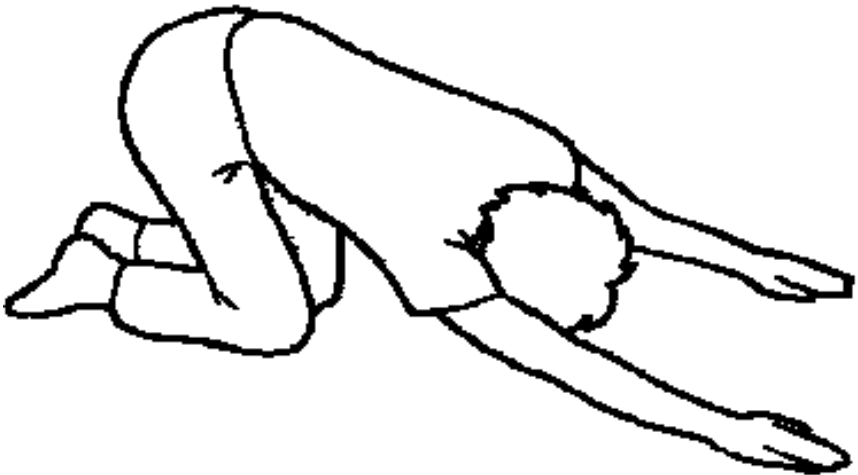
This exercise will also stretch your lower and upper back muscles.

Sit comfortably on the floor, bed or mat then slowly slide your arms forwards as much as it is comfortable for you in your stage of pregnancy.

Take five deep breathes.

Return to sitting.

Repeat up to five times.



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## Further help

If these exercises do not help, if they make your pain worse or if your pain increases despite trying all this advice then you should contact your midwife or GP for a referral to physiotherapy.

You may also find these leaflets useful:

### **University Hospitals Bristol and Weston (UHBW) leaflets**

#### **Care of your body in pregnancy**

<http://foi.avon.nhs.uk/download.aspx?did=802>



#### **Pelvic girdle and low back pain in pregnancy**

<http://foi.avon.nhs.uk/download.aspx?did=25650>



### **Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy (POGP) leaflet**

#### **Pregnancy related pelvic girdle pain**

[https://thepogp.co.uk/patient\\_information/womens\\_health/pregnancy\\_pgp\\_lbp.aspx](https://thepogp.co.uk/patient_information/womens_health/pregnancy_pgp_lbp.aspx)



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Smoking is the primary cause of preventable illness and premature death. For support in stopping smoking contact **NHS Smokefree on 0300 123 1044.**

Drinkline is the national alcohol helpline. If you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call this free helpline in complete confidence. **Drinkline on 0300 123 1110.**

To access all patient leaflets and information please go to the following address:  
<http://foi.avon.nhs.uk/>

**Bristol switchboard: 0117 923 0000**

**Weston switchboard: 01934 636 363**

**[www.uhbw.nhs.uk](http://www.uhbw.nhs.uk)**



For an interpreter or signer please contact the telephone number on your appointment letter.



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