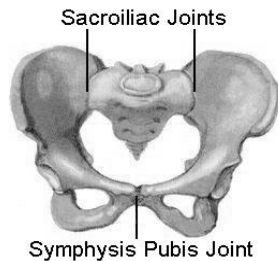


Staying strong in pregnancy

Why do my hips hurt?

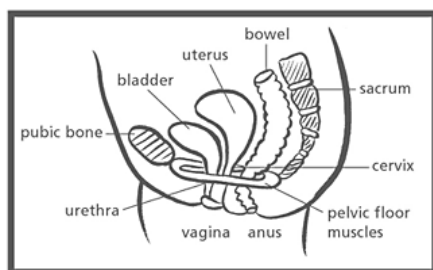
There are three joints in the pelvis – two joints which join the pelvis to the sacrum at the bottom of the spine, and one pubic joint at the front.



During pregnancy, your body produces hormones which soften the ligaments and other soft tissues around the pelvic joints. This helps the pelvis to stretch slightly, allowing your baby to travel down through the birth canal during birth.

Your body changes shape during pregnancy, with your tummy muscles stretching and your centre of gravity moving forwards as the baby grows in your womb. The weight of the baby in your womb puts extra stress and strain through your pelvic joints and pelvic floor muscles. Your tummy and pelvic floor muscles often become weak during pregnancy.

Where are my pelvic floor muscles and what do they do?



Your pelvic floor muscles stretch like a trampoline across the floor of the pelvis, running from the coccyx (tailbone at the back) through to the pubic bone (at the front), and sideways to the sitting bones.

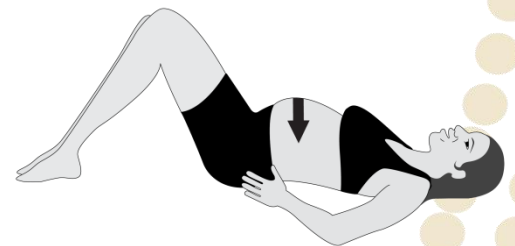
The pelvic floor muscles help to hold in your wee and poo. Your pelvic floor muscles also help to provide support and stability around your pelvic joints.

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles by squeezing around the vagina, front and back passages all at once, lifting up and inwards (“squeeze and lift”). Try to hold the squeeze for 2-3 seconds and then release and relax your muscles. Repeat this as many times as you can, up to a maximum of 8-10 squeezes.

What about my tummy muscles?

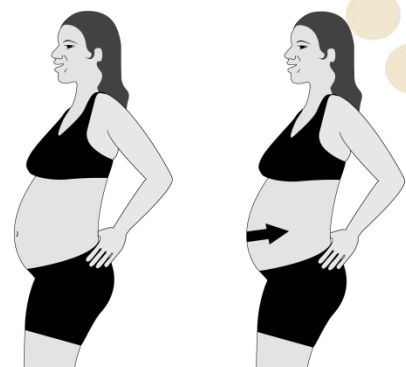
Pelvic tilt exercises help keep your tummy muscles strong when you are pregnant. This exercise can also help to reduce back pain.

With your knees bent and feet flat, gently flatten the curve of your lower back by tilting your pelvis/hips backwards. Hold for 3-5 seconds, if you can. Do this exercise standing up or lying down.



Abdominal bracing uses your deep tummy muscles to help look after your back.

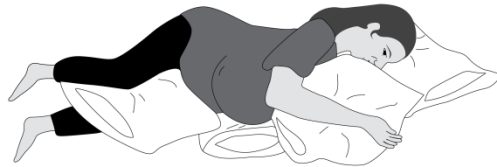
Gently draw your low tummy (belly button and below) in towards your spine – please remember to keep breathing. Do this often during the day and gradually increase the length of hold.



What else can I do?

Try to make all of your movements during the day as **symmetrical** as possible to reduce the strain on your pelvic joints.

- Sit down to put on your underwear, pants, socks and shoes.
- Avoid stairs and steep slopes wherever you can.
- Keep your knees together as you get in/out of a car and when you are rolling over in bed.
- Sleep on your side, with pillows under your belly and between your knees.



Use your tummy and pelvic floor muscles to brace and protect your pelvis and back when you are doing activities that may strain the joints.

Whenever you lift anything or change position (eg roll over in bed, get out of a chair), remember to first tighten your pelvic floor muscles and brace your tummy muscles – “Zip up”.



This should be continued throughout your life whenever you push/pull or lift anything to protect your pelvic floor and spine.

For more information

**Women’s Health Physiotherapy
Level 1, Zone F**

**72 King William Road
North Adelaide SA 5006
Telephone: (08) 8161 7579
www.wch.sa.gov.au**

What about the pain in my bottom muscle?

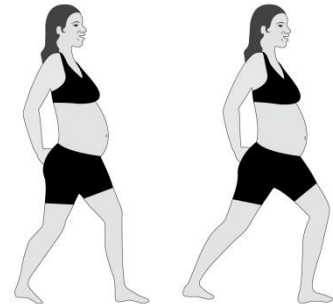
Piriformis is a small muscle found deep within the gluteal (bottom) muscles. It often tightens to try and protect the pelvic joints during pregnancy. When piriformis tightens, it can also press on the sciatic nerve, causing pain down the back of your leg.

- Firm piriformis massage can help with the pain. You can do this yourself (eg with a tennis ball or your hands/fingers) or ask family/friends to do this for you.
- Heat (eg wheat bags/hot water bottles/warmth from your shower) can help.

What about calf cramps?

Many women experience foot/leg/thigh cramps during pregnancy, especially at night:

- Drink enough fluids. Aim for 1.5 – 2 litres per day – water is best.
- Stretch your calf muscles daily. Hold each stretch for 20-30 seconds:



Remember:

Your pelvis likes symmetry. Protect your joints as you go through your day.

Three key exercises to do every day:

1. pelvic tilt
2. abdominal bracing
3. pelvic floor muscles

Always tighten your pelvic floor and brace your tummy muscles before lifting anything or changing position – “Remember to zip up!”

Wear your brace/belt as fitted by your physiotherapist.

Consider pregnancy water or land based exercise classes.

Aim for at least 30 minutes of walking on most days (unless your midwife or doctor has told you not to).

