



Pregnant? See your Chiropractor by John Ferguson, D.C.

So you just found out you're pregnant? Congratulations!

In my experience, I would predict you have certainly experienced low back pain, leg cramps, some numbness or tingling into your extremities or other discomforts. The mother's spine and pelvis undergoes many changes and adaptations to compensate for the growing baby and the risk of interference to her nervous system is increased. Most discomfort is caused by the attenuation of the curve in the lower part of your spine and, to a small degree, increased weight gain. In compensation to the changes in the body's center of gravity, the neck area shifts in posture as well. These spinal changes often place pressure on delicate nerves and you may experience pain/tingling in the arms/hands, 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 is common in moms-to-be that get adjusted in my office and respond very well since specific chiropractic care throughout pregnancy works with enhancing nervous system function providing greater health potential for both the mother and baby.

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 fruit or whole wheat toast, even before getting out of bed. A light snack just before bed will often alleviate many of these come-and-go symptoms. Drinking plenty of water to avoid dehydration and eating smaller amounts of food more often will help 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 I can find the subluxated (misaligned) vertebrae in the spine 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, couple with the hormone progesterone's effects on the stomach, can cause indigestion and heartburn.

Alfalfa or peppermint tea will often help. A visit to my office 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 fiber and bulk. Though prune juice may help, it is not what I recommend because of its chemical action on the large intestine. As a chiropractor, I see many patients with constipation because the nerves from the back area of your spine control your large intestine. I have had great success in looking after this type of problem.

Another important reason for care throughout pregnancy is to help establish balance in the mother's pelvis. Because of a lifetime of stress and trauma to her spine and pelvis, her pelvic opening may be compromised, resulting in a less than optimum passage for the baby. Williams Obstetrics Text tells us that, "Any contraction of the pelvic diameters that diminish the capacity of the pelvis can create dystocia (difficulty) during labor." They further state that the diameter of the woman's pelvis is decreased when the sacrum (spinal base) is displaced. Dr. Abraham Towbin, medical researcher on birth, tells us that the bony pelvis may become "deformed" this way by trauma. Additionally, these compensations to her spine and pelvis during pregnancy are likely to cause an imbalance to her pelvic muscles and ligaments. The woman's pelvis supports her growing uterus with specific ligaments. When the pelvic bones are balanced, the uterus is able to enlarge symmetrically with the growing baby. If the bones of the pelvis are out of alignment or subluxated, this will directly affect the way the uterus will be supported. Unequal ligament support of the uterus will torque the uterus reducing the maximum amount of room for the developing baby. The term used to describe this is intrauterine constraint.

In some cases, this constraint restricts the baby's positions during pregnancy adversely affecting his/her developing spine and cranium. Additionally, these limitations on the baby's movement during pregnancy may prevent him/her from getting into the best possible position for birth. Any birth position other than the ideal vertex, occiput anterior position of the baby indicates the inhibiting effects of constraint. Such positions lead to longer more painful labors with increased medical interventions in birth. Often c-sections are resorted to and both the mother and baby miss the many benefits of a natural vaginal birth.

As a trained Chiropractor in the Webster technique, a specific chiropractic adjustment for pregnant mothers to correct sacral subluxations, I am able to balance muscles and ligaments in the woman's pelvis, remove constraint and allow the baby to get into the best possible position for birth.

As for movement, I recommend walking and stretching the hip, thigh and calf muscles, especially to reduce lactic acid build-up and reduce the likelihood of cramps. Pregnancy is not the time for radical change, in particular with exercise. However, it is important to realize that whatever a mother does to her body or takes in affects her unborn baby. Therefore, good nutrition actually starts before the baby is born and eating a well-balanced diet will supply the essential nutrients needed for mother, baby and placenta.

Generally, a baby will take whatever it needs nutritionally from its mother. As a result, moms become malnourished. During pregnancy, the body has an increased appetite and need for protein. After all, these are the baby's building blocks of life. Remember, the baby is growing at a rate seven times faster than a toddler! If you are 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 35lbs 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 would 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. Natural sodium (a part of salt) should be used to taste and eat generally in accordance with appetite. In other words, eat when you feel like it, not when the clock or someone else tells you to. By the way, I recommend sea salt or Celtic salt over table salt that probably contains aluminum. 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 very normal part of being pregnant.

Nutrition and Supplements A women requires at least 800mg 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 in dark leafy vegetables. I also recommend a natural liquid iron supplement from a 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 the foods that also have iron. Calcium is another very essential mineral. During pregnancy, at least 1200mg are required daily. While found in dairy foods, calcium is also found in raw almonds, which can make a nice substitute for milk. If you insist on dairy, use a fermented dairy product like kefir or yogurt (but not with added sugars).

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. Vitamin D3 supplements can usually be consumed at a safe level of 1000 units daily.

I would also like to caution expectant 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 also 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 as it helps with digestion and soothes nausea. So does ginger root. Other herbs such as chamomile and Echinacea are very relaxing but should be taken in the gentlest way possible, as hot tea.

There are a number of no-nos that should not be heeded while you are pregnant. One of them is alcohol. Alcohol crosses the blood-brain 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 sodas, coffee, black and green teas, 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, lunch meats, etc.

Be very cautious with medication. All drugs, whether prescription or over the counter, affect a growing fetus. They will have adverse effects on the growing baby and should be discouraged at all costs. I recommend a visit to a naturopath or herbalist to seek alternatives. I also highly recommend while you're pregnant to move, exercise on a regular basis, but avoid back extensions and pelvic tilts. Walking and gentle rebounding make for excellent exercises and are best for your baby. Most importantly, schedule an evaluation with a chiropractor trained in maternity/pediatrics like me. It is the best investment you can make in your health and the health of your baby.

I have taken care of dozens of pregnant moms, their newborns, kids and families and have done extensive training and research to provide your family the most optimum health – naturally! Should you have any questions, you are welcome to call our office or check out our website for additional information.

Ferguson Family Chiropractic ~ Exit 9 ~ The Crossings ~ Clifton Park, NY

518.383.5595 ~ www.ForLifetimeWellness.com