

# Pregnancy and Pelvic Girdle Pain

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Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Team

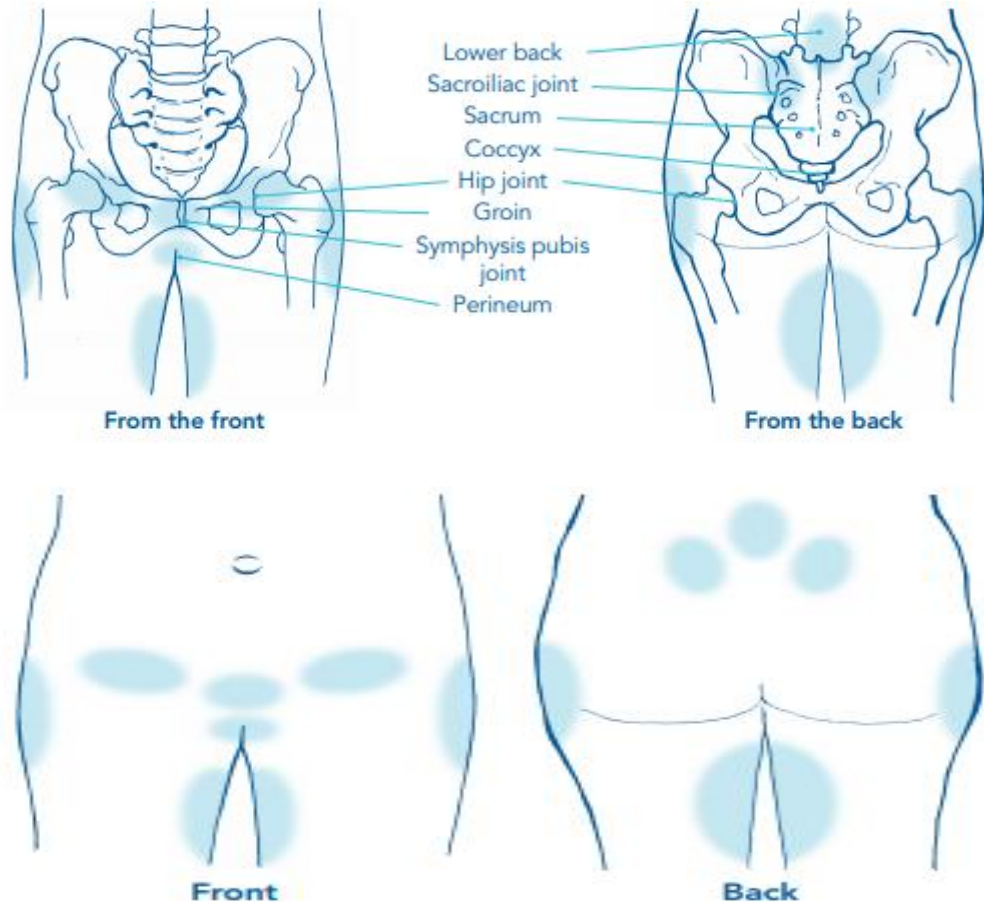
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# Pregnancy and Pelvic Girdle Pain

Areas of the body that can be affected by PGP



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*What is Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP)?*

- PGP refers to pain that a woman may feel during or shortly after her pregnancy in the joints of the pelvis and the surrounding areas of soft tissue such as the buttocks, lower back and groin
- A lot of women will experience small 'niggles' throughout pregnancy, however some can experience more severe symptoms
- If you are experiencing symptoms of PGP it should not have any negative impact on your baby's health

# Pregnancy and Pelvic Girdle Pain Continued

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- Approximately 1 in 5 pregnant women experience PGP
- Everyone will experience different symptoms, some more severe than others
- Physiotherapy can help you to manage the symptoms of PGP
- If your symptoms don't improve on their own within a week or two you should ask for help from your Midwife, GP, Physiotherapist or other health care worker

PGP is more common if any of the following applies to you:

- You have had multiple pregnancies
- You have had PGP on a previous pregnancy
- You are overweight
- You have a physically hard job, awkward working conditions or poor working posture
- You have a history of lower back or pelvic pain/trauma
- You have hyper-mobile joints

# Symptoms of Pelvic Girdle Pain may Include...

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- Pain/difficulty walking
- Pain when standing on one leg
- Pain/difficulty moving legs apart e.g. getting out of the car
- Clicking or grinding in the pelvic bones
- Limited or painful hip movements
- Pain with changing position e.g. turning over in bed
- Pain during normal activities of life e.g. doing the housework
- Inability to tolerate long periods of time in one position

# What causes Pelvic Girdle Pain?

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There is not always an obvious cause for PGP or it may be caused by a combination of factors:

- The joints of the pelvic girdle may be stiff or moving unevenly
- A change in the activity of the muscles of your tummy, pelvic girdle, hips and pelvic floor can lead to the pelvic girdle feeling less supported (rest assured though, the pelvis is a very strong structure that is designed for this!)
- Changes in your posture as your baby grows
- Changes in the position of the baby
- A small number of women may have pain in their pelvic joints caused by hormonal changes during pregnancy

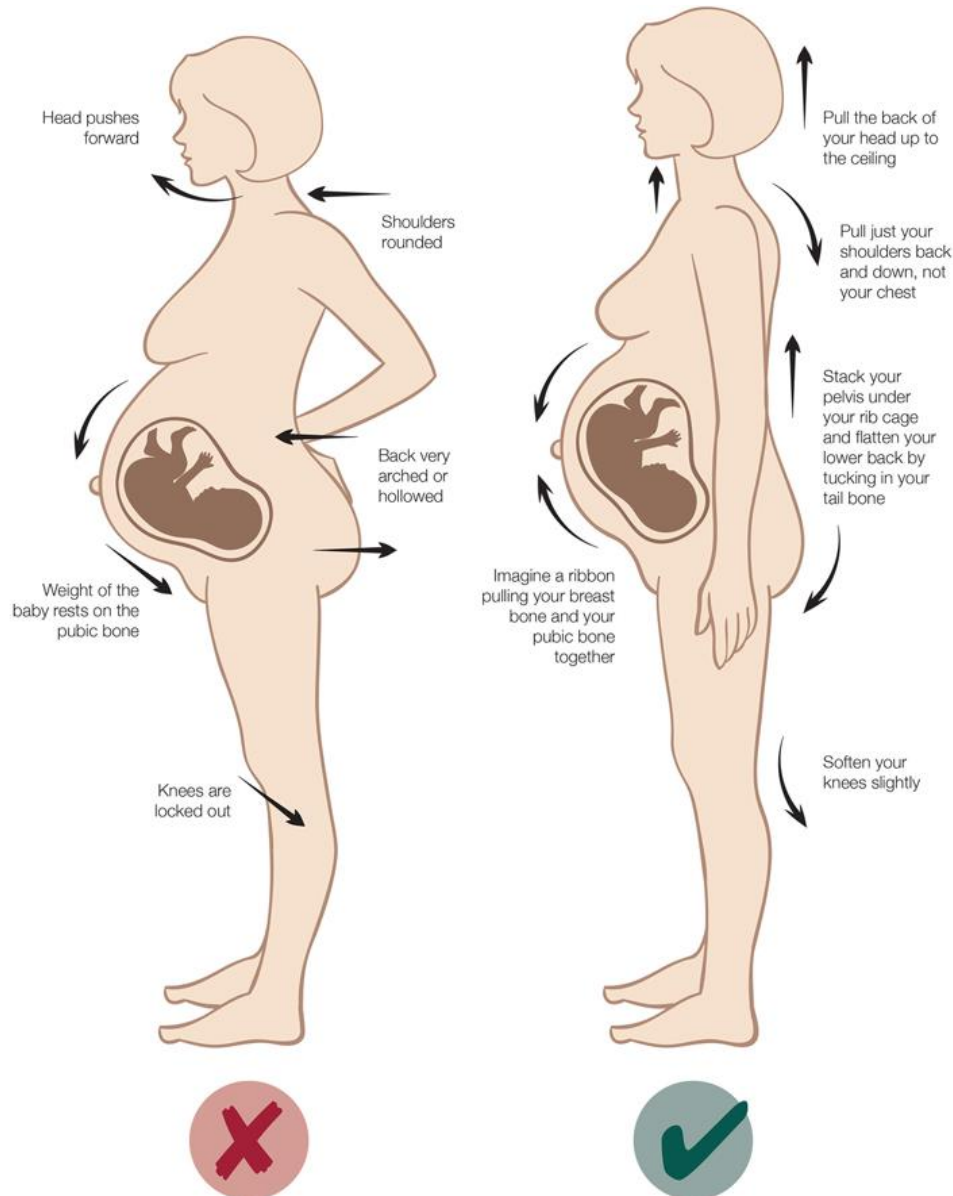
# What can I do to Manage my Symptoms of PGP?

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- Try and keep yourself gently active. Activities such as pregnancy yoga, Pilates, swimming and walking can all help to increase your pelvic strength and reduce PGP symptoms
- Think about your posture (see next slide)
- Take regular breaks, pace yourself and get some help around the house or with your daily activities
- Try and keep your pelvis level and symmetrical, e.g. avoid sitting with one leg crossed over the other, standing on one leg/with more weight through one leg or sitting in a twisted position
- Avoid staying in one position for too long
- Try sitting on a gym ball and gently moving your hips in circles or figures of eight
- Work on the abdominal exercises and pelvic floor exercises described in this presentation

Follow this [link](#) to some short videos for tips and information on managing PGP and keeping active during pregnancy  
Further useful information and management advice can be found in this [leaflet](#)

# Maintaining Good Posture



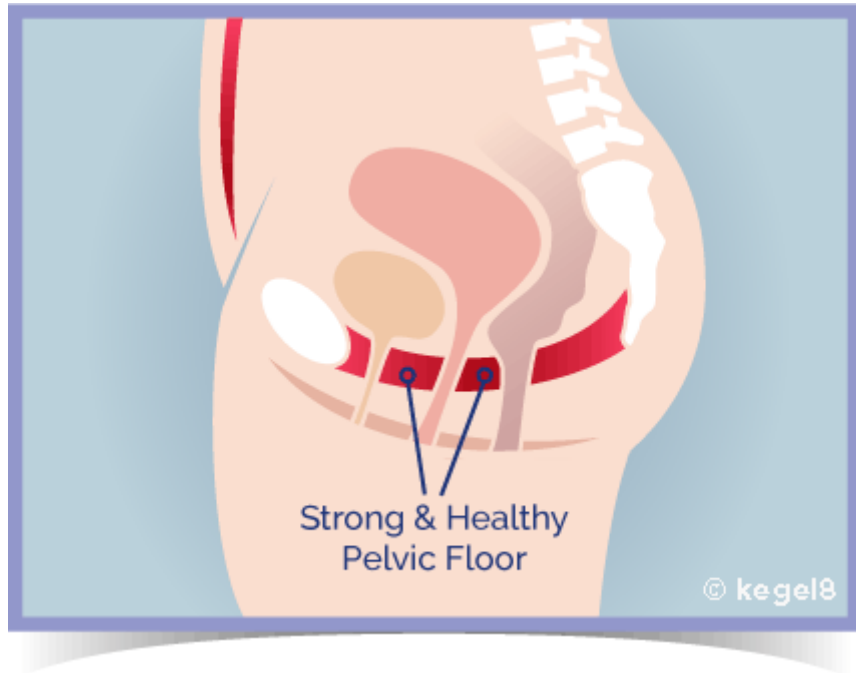
- As your baby grows, your tummy and pelvic floor muscles lengthen and stretch, this can alter your posture and contribute to PGP
- Think about your posture throughout the day and make small corrections to ease your symptoms





# Why do Pelvic Floor Exercises during Pregnancy?

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- To prevent, cure or improve bladder leakage
- To prevent and reduce the risk of developing prolapse symptoms
- To maintain or improve your sexual function
- To ensure your pelvis is strong as your baby grows
- To reduce the likelihood of developing symptoms of PGP or to manage existing symptoms

# How to Find & Squeeze your Pelvic Floor Muscles

- Lie down or sit upright, in a comfortable position

If you are 19 weeks pregnant or over, ensure that you prop your head and shoulders up on a few pillows

- Imagine that you are stopping yourself pass wind and stopping the flow of urine.

- It should feel like a drawing up of the pelvic floor muscles from the back passage towards the bladder

# How to Find & Squeeze your Pelvic Floor Muscles

✔ Breathe normally

✔ You may feel your lower tummy muscles 'joining in' a little

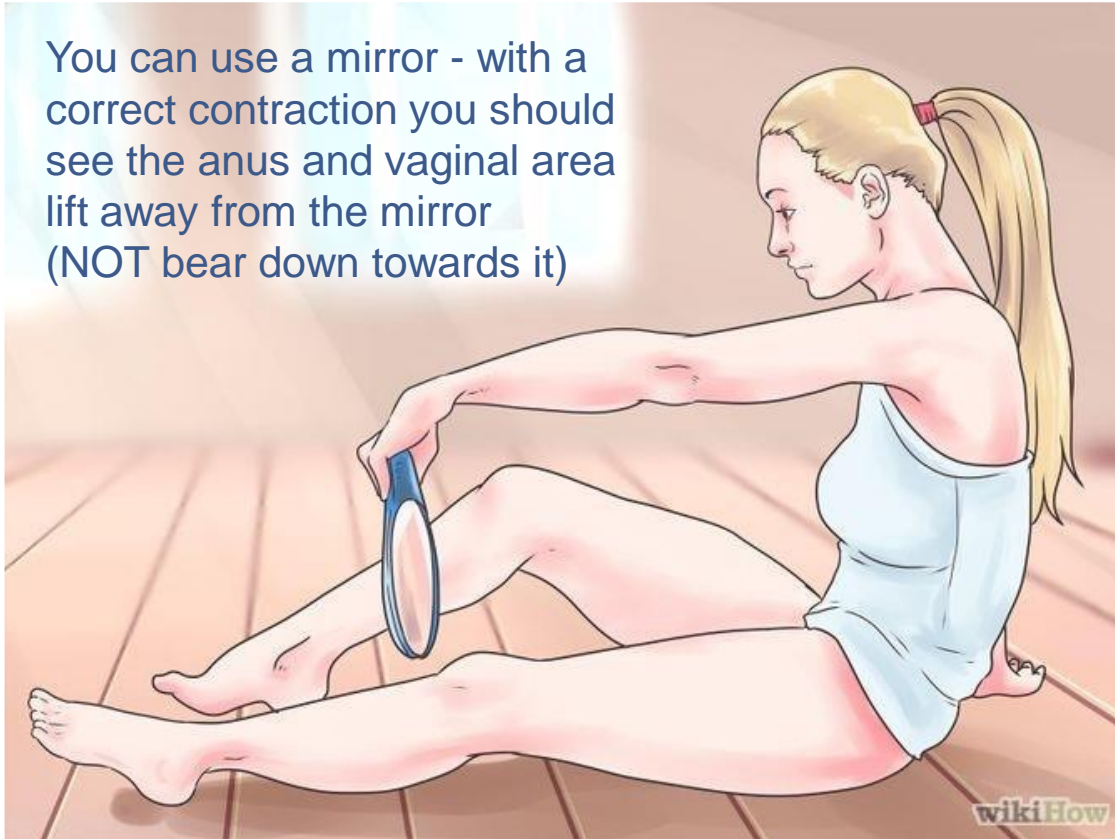
✔ Relax your muscles fully after every contraction

✘ Hold your breath

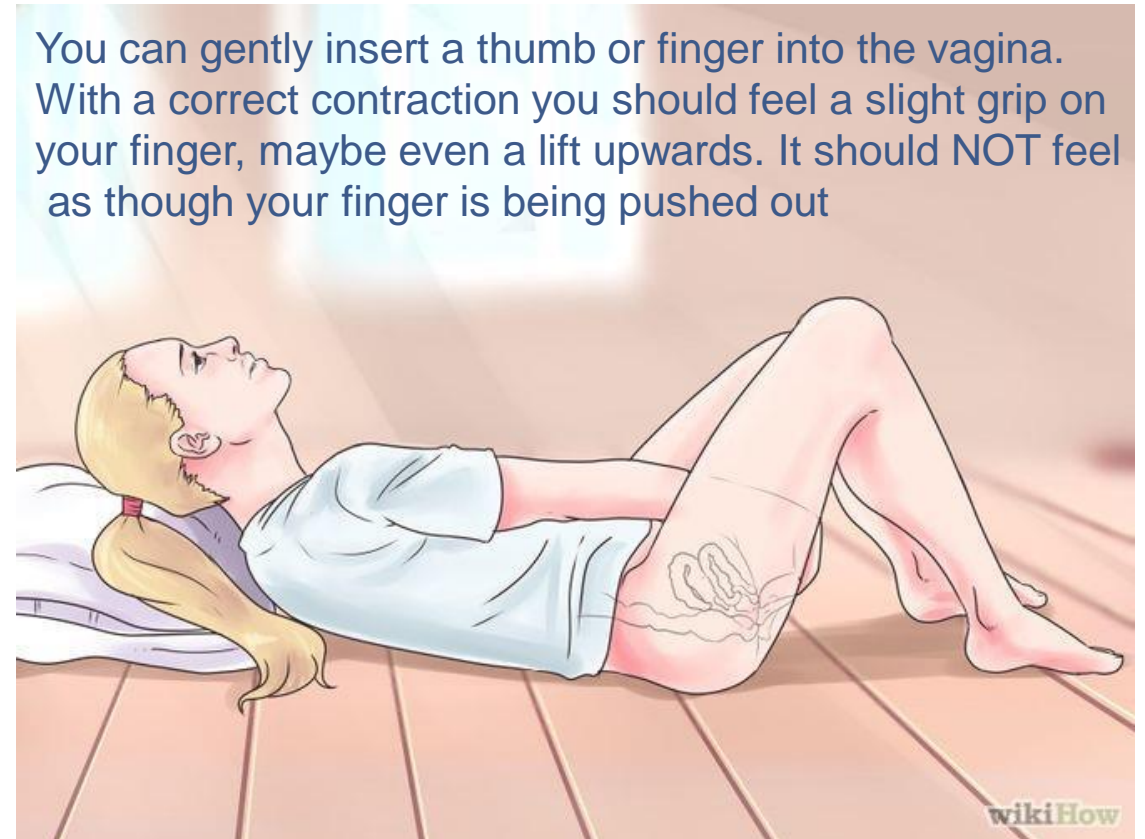
✘ Squeeze your buttock or leg muscles

# Not sure how to find your Pelvic Floor Muscles?

You can use a mirror - with a correct contraction you should see the anus and vaginal area lift away from the mirror (NOT bear down towards it)



You can gently insert a thumb or finger into the vagina. With a correct contraction you should feel a slight grip on your finger, maybe even a lift upwards. It should NOT feel as though your finger is being pushed out



# How to Do Pelvic Floor Exercises

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## Long Squeezes

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles, hold the squeeze, then release them fully. How long can you hold it?

Repeat the long squeezes until the pelvic floor muscles tire. How many times can you repeat it?

## Short Squeezes

Quickly tighten your pelvic floor muscles, then immediately release them fully. How many times can you do this before the muscles tire? This shouldn't be a pulsing motion, you need to make sure you fully relax between each squeeze.

# Exercise Tips

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- Always relax the muscles fully after each squeeze \*
- Aim eventually to do **10 long squeezes**, holding each squeeze for **10 seconds**, followed by **10 short squeezes**
- Aim to do your pelvic floor muscle exercises at least **3 times each day**. You may find it easier sitting or lying down to start with
- If you find that you can only hold the squeeze for a short time, or can only do a few before the muscles tire, it may be better to start doing them '**little and often**'

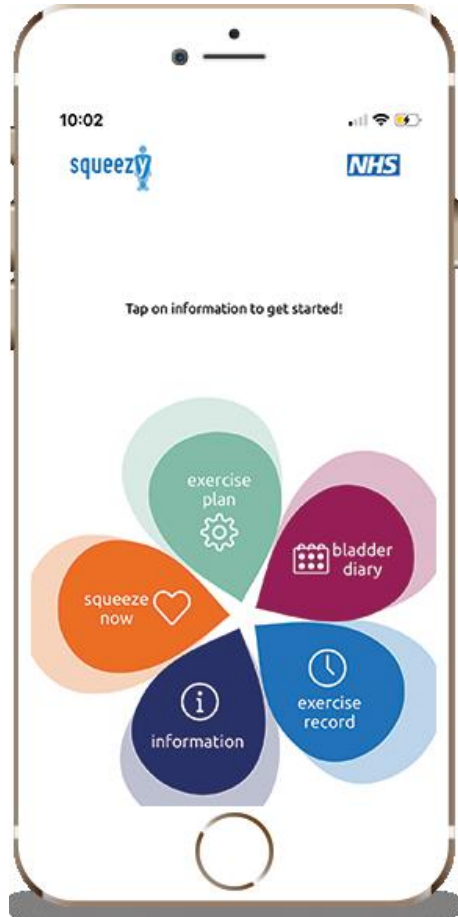
*\*It is important to fully release each squeeze – the aim is to have strong muscles that can fully lengthen too. 'Pulsing' your muscles could shorten them – your muscles need to be able to fully lengthen and stretch around your baby's head during childbirth*

# Exercise Tips

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- You should notice an improvement within **3 - 5 months**
- As your muscles start to feel stronger, try doing the exercises **standing up**
- Keep practising your pelvic floor muscle exercises **once each day** to maintain the improvement
- If you experience pain during or after doing the exercises, or if you don't see any improvement after 5 months, it is important to get advice from a pelvic health physiotherapist

# How to Remember to do Pelvic Floor Exercises



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- Make the exercises part of your daily routine, doing them at the same time as another activity you already do regularly e.g. brushing your teeth
- Set reminders on your phone
- Try one of the pelvic floor exercise apps available
- Do the exercises after emptying your bladder, sitting on the toilet lid (but don't practise by stopping your flow of urine)



# Use Your Pelvic Floor Muscles...

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- When you cough and sneeze and lift heavy objects  
This helps to support your pelvic organs and prevent bladder leakage
- When you lift heavy objects  
Gently squeeze your pelvic floor muscles with your lower tummy muscles  
This helps to support your spine, pelvic organs and prevent bladder leakage
- When you exercise  
For example, practise squeezing your muscles and breathing out as you rise from a squat

# Pelvic Floor Exercises | For More Information

- This animation shows the location of your pelvic floor muscles - [Pelvic Floor Anatomy](#) (*opens in new window*)
- The following is a video of one of our physiotherapists explaining how to do pelvic floor exercises during pregnancy - [Pelvic Floor Exercises](#) (*opens in new window*)
- This is a leaflet version - [Pelvic Floor Exercises For Women](#) (*opens in new window*)

# Why do Abdominal Exercises During Pregnancy?

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- Your deep tummy muscles help to support your spine
- To ease low back pain and symptoms of PGP
- To help reduce any separation of the tummy muscles (known as Diastasis Recti)
- They also work with your pelvic floor muscles to help support your pelvic organs

# How to find your Deep Abdominal Muscles

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- Lie on your back comfortably with your fingertips resting on the inside of each hip bone (or on your lower bump, above your pubic bone)  
If you are 19 weeks pregnant or over, ensure that you prop your head and shoulders up on a few pillows
- Take a deep breath in
- As you breathe out, squeeze the muscles around your back passage and slowly draw your lower tummy muscles in towards your spine as though squeezing into a tight belt  
You should feel your tummy muscles tighten underneath your fingertips or just above your pubic bone
- Hold this position whilst gently breathing in and out
- Try and hold for 5 seconds, building up to 10. Aim to repeat up to 10 times



# How to do Abdominal Exercises Continued

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- You can also try these exercises in side lying, sitting, on all 4's or even when standing up
- Make sure you don't hold your breath
- Gradually build up how long you can hold for and the number of repetitions
- Aim to do them twice daily
- Try engaging your abdominal muscles about 30% when walking around, going up and down stairs or moving from one position to another, particularly if you are experiencing PGP symptoms

# How to Use Your Abdominal Muscles

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- Your abdominal muscles work with your pelvic floor muscles to help to support your spine
- When you lift something heavy, draw in your pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles
- It's also a good idea to keep the object you're lifting close to you, and to use your leg muscles

# Pelvic Girdle Pain and Labour

- If you are experiencing PGP, you should still be able to deliver your baby according to your original birth plan
- It is worth informing your midwife that you have been experiencing PGP so that they can help you to avoid any positions that you may find uncomfortable during labour
- You can add details of comfortable and uncomfortable positions to your birth plan
- Practise moving between comfortable positions before labour so you feel confident. Your birth partner can help with this

- A water birth may be a good option for you
- During labour, try and keep gently active by standing or walking around
- You may find it comfortable to rest on your hands and knees or to kneel up
- Try and avoid lying on your back or sitting for long periods during labour as this can slow the labour down



*\*These positions may feel comfortable during labour\**



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

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Aneurin Bevan  
University Health Board

# Postnatal Pelvic Girdle Pain

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- Most women find that their PGP symptoms pass once their baby has been born
  - However some women may develop new symptoms, or their existing symptoms may linger a little longer into the postnatal period
- You should aim to get started on pelvic floor exercises and abdominal exercises as soon as you can following the delivery of your baby
  - This will help strengthen your pelvis, reduce low back pain and help you return to normal function more quickly
  - When you feel ready to exercise, Pilates can be a great way of increasing your pelvic and core strength postnatally and helping to reduce lasting symptoms of PGP



# Useful Resources

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## Useful websites

- [ABUHB Pelvic Health Physiotherapy](#)
- [NHS Fitness Studio Pilates](#)

## Useful leaflets

- [Fit for Birth](#)
- [Fit for Pregnancy](#)
- [Pregnancy Related Pelvic Girdle Pain](#)