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Pregnancy, Back Pain & Chiropractic

By Mark Studin | May 2010

"Back pain during pregnancy can be significant in terms of intensity and resulting disability" (Stuber & Smith, 2008, p. 447). It often exacerbates (magnifies) an underlying problem with the change in body mechanics as the pregnancy progresses and the fetus grows. One study found that 35.5% of woman had at least moderately severe back pain during 1 or more of their pregnancies. The pain scales of the pregnant woman (on the Owestry rating scale of 0-10, where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain imaginable) ranged from 5.86 to 9.21.

One of the problems with patients not seeking care during pregnancy is this can become a long-term chronic condition and inherently more difficult to resolve as muscles and connective tissue compensate to accommodate the increasing forward center of gravity. Over time, the tissue becomes "patterned" to the 9 month temporary state and abruptly changed, upon delivery. These multiple, sudden changes can cause a weakening of the supportive tissue, creating an abnormal chronic problem if not stabilized during pregnancy.

One study, in a retrospective review of 179 pregnant woman in 5 clinics regarding back pain during pregnancy and labor, found that 85% reported relief of their low back pain as a direct result of chiropractic care. In an unrelated study, 25% had complete remission of their back pain, 50% reported feeling very well and 15% were feeling better. Only 10% reported no changes.

In one study, the average pain scale prior to chiropractic care was 7.58 out of 10 and while they were under chiropractic care was 4.25. A second study revealed the average pain scale before chiropractic care was 5.9 and post chiropractic care 1.5 out of 10 on the Owestry scale.

This author, having practiced chiropractic for 30 years and cared for 100's of pregnant patients during that time, has had similar results in the clinical setting. The primary reason these pregnant patients have sought chiropractic care has been that it is a drugless approach and it works. Beyond that, pregnant patients shouldn't spend 9 months in pain. They should be able to enjoy an active pregnancy and get the exercise needed to have a healthy, full-term labor and delivery.