

Pelvic Girdle Pain: some tips from Yoga to help you manage it

Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP) formerly known as Symphysis Pubis Dysfunction (SPD) affects up to one in four women at some time during their pregnancy. It describes a state when the pelvis becomes unstable to the extent it becomes painful to do certain movements. The instability, and corresponding discomfort, may be experienced in one or more places:

- The pubis symphysis – the cartiligenous join at the front of the pelvis. The discomfort here is often described as a sharp pain triggered by certain movements such as walking up and down stairs, turning over in bed, getting in and out of the car
- The sacro-iliac joints – where the sacrum and the pelvis meet at the back of the pelvis. A lot of women suffer from lower back pain in pregnancy so if this is affecting you please do be specific about where this is as it could be an indicator of PGP rather than lumbar pain due to example to poor posture.
- The hip joints – where the legs and pelvis meet to the sides of the pelvis.

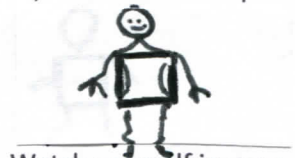
Pain in the pelvis and lower back does not necessarily mean you have PGP but do get it checked out by a physiotherapist that your GP/midwife can refer you to so you have a correct diagnosis.

Once you know you have PGP, please continue with Yoga as many of the women who attend have reported that they are better able to manage their discomfort as they learn which movements help and which need to be avoided – thereby taking these skills into everyday life.

The principles of alignment to help minimise PGP

It is useful for *all* pregnant women to have good posture and to understand how their movements affect their pelvis as this may help to prevent the onset or worsening of PGP:

The rectangle Visualise a rectangle from one shoulder to the other shoulder, and from one hip to the other hip with the sides of the rectangle being the sides of the body:

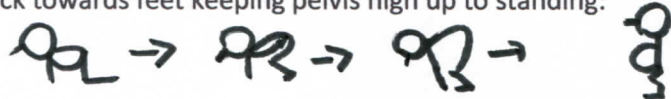


When sitting or standing as far as possible let this rectangle remain intact. Watch yourself in your everyday life. Keeping the hips level is really important to maintain the stability of the pelvis – it may be that you have a habit of dropping one hip when you are standing by bending one knee and taking the weight on the other leg, or that when you sit you are lopsided. This puts stress on the pelvis so instead adopt standing and sitting positions where the pelvis remains level.

Walking the rectangle: put it on springs! When you stand allow your knees to soften and feel both feet stable on the ground. Practice walking up and down on the spot by alternately lifting one heel and lowering it, then the other. Keep your hands on top of your hips and check that the pelvis is remaining stable and level – only the feet and legs are working. When you have mastered this take into a walk, imagining walking your rectangle on springs, taking small steps and keeping the knees loose. Adopt this walk in everyday life, you will find you can even move quite fast in this way if you need to. Use the same principles going up and down stairs – if you need to you can step both feet onto one step before you go onto the next step.

Take your time moving from one position to another In class you will learn how to safely move from one position to another:

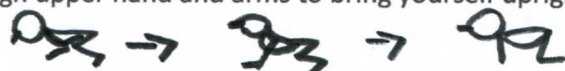
- **getting up/down from the floor** – go into cat (all fours) , tuck toes under and walk hands back towards feet keeping pelvis high up to standing:



Avoid bringing one knee out in front in a lunge and using that to push against to come to standing:



- **rolling over from lying on one side (to other side or up to sitting)**- keep your knees bent lying on your side. TAKE YOUR TIME and use your arms not your pelvis. Push into floor through upper hand and arms to bring yourself upright into cat or seated:



Movements to avoid: Pain is your body trying to warn you against certain movements so do listen to those signals. Movements which exacerbate PGP include: making large and sudden movements with the legs such as taking big steps or swinging legs over in bed; asymmetrical movements where one leg or hip is doing something different from the other side such as bracing one leg to turn a shopping trolley around a corner.

Stabilise the muscles around the pelvis Strong muscles around the pelvis can help to compensate for pelvic instability. Key ones to strengthen are **the muscles of the pelvic floor, abdomen and buttocks**. A good example of a stabilising practice is as follows: take a full inhale, as you breathe out draw up the pelvic floor, gently draw back the transversus abdominus (belt muscle across the lower abdomen which we naturally contract when we cough) and tense the buttocks. Breathe in to relax this group of muscles, breathe out and repeat. This can be done seated, standing, in cat or lying down. Visualise a corset of supporting muscles around your lower body helping to bring stability. Find a comfortable breathing rhythm so you can do several repetitions, and incorporate into your daily life.



Dealing with the emotion of PGP Most pain has an emotional effect on us. Women with PGP can quite naturally feel scared, exhausted, powerless, angry, desperate, tearful and at times understandably need support. If we can understand pregnancy as a journey of discovery about ourselves as well as our roles as mothers then we can start to be open to the experiences we encounter. PGP can be the body's way of saying SLOW DOWN – once we do we often find the pain is much more manageable, and we may discover other benefits to a slower paced life such as less stress, imparting a greater feeling of wellbeing to the baby inside and an easier adjustment to motherhood.

Allowing yourself time to regularly relax – such as in the relaxations we do in a Yoga class - will also help you to release the physical tension associated with managing pain. Once in a comfortable and supported position you can consciously let each and every part of your body soften and surrender to the freeing rhythm of your natural breath.