



soothing backpains

One of the most common pregnancy discomfort is back pain, usually in the lower back. WONG SIOW YUEN finds out how you can alleviate it safely.

Pregnancy hormones, responsible for mood swings and nausea, are likely to blame for that dull backache that afflicts mothers-to-be. One such hormone is called relaxin, which relaxes the joints in the pelvis to help push the baby through the birth canal. However, it can also cause abnormal motion in many other joints, causing inflammation and pain. A pregnant woman has 10 times more relaxin than a non-pregnant woman, hence the aches.

The second reason for back pain is the growing foetus, which causes the abdominal muscles to stretch beyond their normal state. Because of this, the muscles lose their ability to perform their normal role of maintaining body posture. The lower back ends up taking the extra weight, causing strain.

Obstetrician and gynaecologist Ann Tan says: "The growing uterus causes a shift in the centre of gravity and the mum-to-be would tend to curve her spine more anteriorly, towards the

front, leading to lower back strain. This is especially so when the pregnancy gets more advanced." You can usually expect back pain from mid-pregnancy onwards (ie. 24 weeks on). Dr Tan advises those with pre-existing back pain to maintain correct posture and carriage during pregnancy to reduce the incidence of back strain. Wearing supportive pregnancy girdles will also help to reduce the pain.

SWEET RELIEF * To help minimise back pains, there are a couple more simple things you can do:

- Cut down on your physical activities, especially those that stress the lower back and pelvis, like climbing stairs, walking long distances and standing for long periods of time.
- Sleeping with your face up puts a lot of pressure on your back. Lying on your side with a pillow between your knees would reduce the pressure. If you are used to sleeping on your back, placing a pillow under your knees can cut the pressure by half. Another small pillow under the lower back will also help.
- Control your diet to avoid excessive weight gain, which will make the strain worse.
- Strengthen your back muscles through exercise or yoga.

The seven yoga poses below are good for strengthening the lower back, and increasing lung capacity and elasticity for easy delivery. Do them once or twice a week if you are in your third to eighth month of pregnancy. Yoga instructor Vempalla N Reddy, or Omkar, as he prefers to be called, handles the prenatal classes at True Yoga. He describes the poses:

1. BREATHING Sit cross-legged on the floor in a meditative pose. Keep the back straight and rest hands, palms facing up, on the knees. Close your eyes.

Place the right thumb over the right nostril to close it and inhale slowly through the left nostril. Close the left nostril with the ring finger on the right hand and release the thumb that was over the right nostril. Exhale through the right nostril. Then, inhale through the right nostril and close it with the right thumb. Open the left nostril and exhale through the left. This is one set. Do five sets.

The timing of the breathing is important. Maintain a ratio of 1:2. That means, if you are inhaling for five seconds, exhale for 10 seconds.

The abdominal muscles stretch to accommodate the growing foetus, losing their ability to support body posture.

2. CAT POSE Get down on hands and knees, tucking toes in. Spread the knees and feet slightly and stretch out your toes.

Exhale while pushing the lower back upwards and tucking the head down. Inhale with the head looking upwards and lower back pushed downwards. Do this five times.

3. CAT POSE BALANCING In the same hands and knees position, raise your right hand and left leg, keeping them in a straight line with the back and shoulders. Repeat with the left hand and right leg. Do three sets.

4. BRIDGE POSE Lie on your back and bend the knees. Place your feet as close as possible to your bottom, feet apart. Slowly lift the hips and lower back up with the support of your hands – your thumb supporting your back, your

fingers over your sides. Hold the pose for seven seconds then slowly return to the starting position. Do three sets.

5. SPINAL TWIST Lie on your back with feet together and knees bent. Rest arms, palms facing up, on the floor at shoulder level.

Slowly drop both knees to the right while turning your head to look to the left. Repeat on the opposite side. Do three sets.

6. SINGLE LEG RAISES Lie on your back with legs together and rest hands by the thighs, palms down. Bend the left leg till the left foot is beside the right knee.

Slowly raise the right leg to about 30 degrees and hold for five seconds. Raise further to 60 degrees and hold for five seconds. Increase to 90 degrees and hold for five seconds. Return the leg slowly to starting position. Repeat with the left leg. Do three sets.

7. TREE POSE While standing, slowly bend one knee and slide the foot of that leg up to rest on the front of the thigh of the other leg.

Maintaining balance, slowly raise both hands up and place the palms together above the head. Keep eyes focused on something in front of you to help in balancing. Hold the position for 15 seconds.

8. MODIFIED COBRA POSE Stand with feet together, in front of a chair. Hold the back of the chair for support.

Slowly raise your chin up and drop your head backwards. Bend your back backwards and hold for five to seven seconds, then return to the starting position. Do three times. **VP**