



Chiropractic Care for Mom and Baby

By Patricia Hort, DC

You may have noticed that chiropractic care is becoming an important part of pregnancy and birth preparation for a number of moms-to-be in your circle. With an increased interest in natural births and a desire to avoid c-sections, women are incorporating chiropractic care into their prenatal care regime.

Pregnancy and life with baby should be an exciting and enjoyable time in our lives. Are you living your best life right now during your pregnancy or with your new baby? Pregnancy and the body changes that go along with it can be a little challenging as we attempt to keep up with our pre-pregnancy life be it at work or caring for our other children, but we can experience it with a lot more comfort and really celebrate this exciting time.

Can chiropractic care make a difference and really improve our quality of life during pregnancy and life with baby? What I see in practice is a resounding, yes. Greater comfort, fewer complaints, more energy, an easier time during pregnancy and a shorter labour and delivery is supported by current research and further backed up by testimonials. That's what really counts. The real life experiences women are having and sharing when they are under chiropractic care during pregnancy and post partum. Unfortunately, I still meet too many moms who say, "I wish I would have known about chiropractic care with my first baby." I would like to change that.

Let's look at some of the research findings. According to recent studies, chiropractic care may result in easier pregnancy including increased comfort during the third trimester and delivery and reduced need for analgesics (pain medication). In one study, women receiving chiropractic care through their first pregnancy had 24% reduction in labour times and subjects giving birth for the second or third time reported 39% reduction in labour times. In another study, the need for analgesics was reduced by 50% in the patients who received adjustments. In addition, 84% of women report relief of back pain during pregnancy with chiropractic care. When women receive chiropractic care throughout pregnancy, the movement of the sacroiliac joints is improved and maintained. As a result, there is significantly less likelihood of back labour (contractions and sharp pain felt in the lower back during labour). If you are 1 in 200 women who suffer from pre-eclampsia with hypertension and albuminuria (protein in urine), chiropractic care may be of benefit. The cause is unknown but can lead to seizures, coma, and death. One study investigated the link between the lumbar spine (located in the low back) and pre-eclampsia. It revealed that women with decreased lumbar spine curves had more pre-eclampsia. They also found that patients with reduced lumbar curves had decreased blood flow to the iliac artery than normal pregnant women.

A better understanding of the biomechanics of the pelvis during pregnancy will help shed some light on how chiropractic can make such a difference and why it is needed. As mom's weight increases, her center of gravity shifts and her body must compensate. The laxity in the ligaments required for birth creates instability in all of her joints, including the spine and pelvis. These factors can lead to spinal and pelvic misalignment and can predispose nerves, muscles, bones and connective tissues to stress and damage. Although chiropractic care can offer relief from so many of the conditions that most women are told are just 'part of being pregnant', the focus with chiropractic care is on prevention of those symptoms. Women were made to have babies. Pregnancy is a normal, natural, healthy part of life. Symphysis pubis pain, sciatica, waddling, low back pain, hip pain when sleeping and lower back pain can occur due to postural compensation and laxity, however they aren't 'normal' things, they are 'common' things. Chiropractic care is scheduled so that you can avoid many of these symptoms. Keeping abreast of the changes that your body is going through and ensuring that your body adapts to those changes is where chiropractic plays the most important role.

How does chiropractic help those conditions? Chiropractic care helps restore proper joint alignment and motion which in turn allows for proper function of the muscles, tendons and ligaments throughout the spine, but most specifically the pelvis during pregnancy and in preparation for labour and delivery. Chiropractic adjustments also allow your nervous system to function properly without irritation or interference at the joints of the spine and sacrum.

Your pelvis needs to be functioning at its best for your body to adapt to the changes of pregnancy, to create a neutral environment for baby to develop in and for an efficient labour and delivery. If you have flexibility in the joints of the pelvis, your pelvis is balanced (meaning not higher or lower on one side and not rotated) and your nervous system is working like it should be, pregnancy, labour and delivery and post partum should be the normal, natural processes they are meant to be.

Ok, so what could happen if the pelvis is misaligned during pregnancy? An example would be in the case of intrauterine constraint or breech position. A specific chiropractic technique called The Webster Technique works to align the pelvis, reduce stress in the ligaments supporting the uterus, and give the baby as much room as possible to move. A study from The Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics showed 82% of breech babies turned vertex (head down) on their own when the Webster Technique was used to balance the pelvis. Again, a balanced pelvis creates the best environment for the baby to develop in. It can even have an effect on the position of the baby, specifically its head even when it is in the head down position. This has a significant effect on labour and delivery and as such many midwives will refer a pregnant patient to a chiropractor who has experience with baby positioning when they find that the babe is 'posterior' or if the head is tilted.

As the hips and pelvis open up to make room for the baby, additional stress is placed on the sacroiliac joints. The sacroiliac joints are where the pelvis connects to the spine, and can be found where the dimples are in your lower back. Too much pressure, strain, limited movement



or overuse in the sacroiliac joints can cause one-sided low back pain, pain with walking, and pain when transitioning from standing to sitting and rolling over in bed.

Beyond issues with the pelvis, neck pain, headaches, and pain between the shoulder blades are also quite common during pregnancy. The posture and hormonal changes we have been discussing contribute to these pains, but sleeping position also affects these problems significantly. Lying in the same position all night, or in some cases, sleeping sitting up puts tremendous strain on the joints of the neck and spine. This can lead to joint pain and even headaches when certain joints and muscles of the upper neck are affected.

Those issues take us right into post partum and life with baby. Physically, post partum is undoubtedly the most challenging time for a woman's body and there is no question that it far outweighs pregnancy in this respect. Let's consider why. After giving birth:

- the center of gravity changes immediately (it took 9 months in pregnancy)
- ligamentous laxity/instability in the joints (remains for months)
- sleep deprivation is the norm
- many hours sitting is hard on the pelvis
- limited core strength and generally an obvious imbalance between low back and abs
- the poor posture of a new mom looking down and nursing/feeding is taxing
- very high level of stress
- conditions such as diastasis recti or pelvic floor weakness

All of this is happening, and it is often when moms stop doing all the good things they were doing for themselves during pregnancy (exercise, diet, massage, yoga, chiropractic and so on.) This is the most challenging time for your body. A time when you need to take care of your body and health with at least the level of care you were taking during your pregnancy. Chiropractic care continues to support your body's biomechanics in post partum and can make this time much more manageable and comfortable for you and your baby. Chiropractors may also deal with issues such as breast feeding challenges, symphysis pubis pain, diastasis recti, pelvic floor function and other conditions that may be evident during post partum. While I am all for the love and attention focused on the newborn, it shouldn't be at the compromise of mom's good health and well being.

Chiropractors also treat babies, ensuring proper biomechanics and function after birth, helping to manage many symptoms that new parents find challenging. Chiropractic care is safe for babies and children and research supports chiropractic care for numerous pediatric issues. It is a very gentle treatment, modified specifically for the developmental age of the child and parents are pleasantly surprised at how much the little ones enjoy their treatments.

Chiropractors work in collaboration with other health professionals by cross-referral and integrated care to make sure that you and your baby are getting the care you need. It really can make a difference and help you enjoy an empowering pregnancy, labour and delivery and life with baby.

To learn more about chiropractic for pregnancy and children browse our site www.drformoms.com and visit the ICPA website at icpa4kids.org