

Sore ribs in pregnancy

Rib pain is very common in pregnancy, especially during the [third trimester](#) (weeks 28 to 40).

See your GP if:

- you are less than 12 weeks pregnant
- you get shoulder or rib pain

In rare cases this can be a sign of an [ectopic pregnancy](#).

Causes of rib pain in pregnancy

During pregnancy some changes happen to your body that can make rib pain more likely.

Baby getting bigger

As your baby grows and takes up extra space inside you. This can reduce your rib movement and lead to stiffness and pain.

Heartburn, acid reflux and indigestion

Heartburn, acid reflux and indigestion can give you rib pain during pregnancy. This is because your baby is putting pressure on your stomach.

Pregnancy hormones also relax the muscles around your oesophagus (food pipe).

Urinary tract infection

Rib pain, particularly in your lower ribs at the front or the back, can be a sign of a [urinary tract infection](#) (UTI).

Contact your GP if you have any of the following:

- pain when passing urine (peeing)
- cloudy or smelly pee
- blood in the urine
- a high temperature
- burning or stinging feeling when peeing

Preventing rib pain in pregnancy

1. Be mindful of your posture - sitting up straight with your head up and shoulders back reduces your risk of rib pain. It also reduces pain in your [upper back and neck](#).
2. Wear a properly-fitted and supportive bra and avoid underwire. It might be worth getting a nursing bra that you can wear after your baby is born.
3. Pregnancy yoga and Pilates helps improve posture, strength and flexibility.
4. Deep breathing exercises during the day may help, as well as before bedtime.
5. Try using a few pillows at bedtime to help you get comfortable.

Ways to deal with the pain

Try these tips at home to help your rib pain.

Stretches

There are some [stretches](#) that can help you when you have pain in your ribs.

Follow these steps:

1. Try sitting and bending your upper body sideways.
2. Bend away from the side of the pain.
3. Raise the arm on the same side as the pain above your head.
4. Hold for a few minutes, taking deep breaths in and out.
5. Relax. Then return to normal.

A chartered physiotherapist can tailor exercises to your needs.

Other things that may help

- Heat treatment - half fill a hot water bottle and hold it to the area where the pain is (the ribs area, not on the bump).
- Painkillers - you can get a prescription from your obstetrician or GP.

Contact your GP, maternity unit or doctor immediately if you have:

- shortness of breath, coughing up blood or palpitations as these may be signs of a lung infection or a blood clot
- severe pain
- a headache, spots in front of your eyes or dizziness - these could be signs of [pre-eclampsia](#)
- [tummy pains](#) or bleeding from your vagina - if you are less than 12 weeks pregnant get help urgently as this could be a sign of an [ectopic pregnancy](#)

If your pain doesn't improve

Ask your GP or obstetrician to refer you to a chartered physiotherapist who specialises in women's health.

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