

Pregnancy and podiatric health



Treatment options for foot pain during pregnancy are often overlooked as other medical aspects of the pregnancy are prioritised. Yet most pregnant women experience foot pain for prolonged periods throughout pregnancy and the discomfort can be significantly debilitating in its effect on quality of life during an already stressful period. The following five podiatric complications are common during pregnancy and should be observed as part of an overall pregnancy support plan.

1. Weight gain can have a biomechanical impact on the feet as the centre of gravity shifts as a pregnancy progresses. Weight gain can cause or exacerbate metatarsalgia, bursitis and neuroma, along with corns and calluses. Patients should be advised to avoid wearing high heels or any shoes without adequate support.
2. Production of the hormone relaxin during pregnancy will relax ligaments of the feet and ankles as well as of the cervix. This can cause instability and discomfort through overuse of the muscles in the foot for supplemental support and may lead to long-term, irreversible changes to the feet.
3. Increased force to knees and ankles can cause injury and pain. Added force on the feet combined with biomechanical changes cause overpronation and can result in irreparable arch collapse. Arch height is usually reduced during pregnancy and will become worse with future pregnancies.
4. Edema is common in the feet and, as well as causing discomfort, may result in problems getting into shoes and shoe sizes will probably need to be larger than what the patient is used to. Professional fitting is recommended. Patients should be advised to keep feet elevated while sitting down, to avoid crossing the legs, and to avoid sitting or standing for long periods of time, recommend short walks to improve circulation.
5. Foot and leg cramps are common during pregnancy due to altered calcium levels, muscle fatigue and increased pressure on nerves and blood vessels. Massage and exercises are recommended to alleviate symptoms.

Referral to a podiatrist is recommended as prescription orthotics can help to support the feet and to relieve symptoms for all of the five complications listed above and, in combination with podiatric evaluation and development of a pregnancy care plan, can in many cases prevent the negative effects of pregnancy on the feet.



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