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PREGNANCY AND MASSAGE

DEC06 / JAN07 NEWSLETTER

With several recent announcements of “we’re pregnant!”, and resulting questions about pregnancy massage, I thought this was a good time to cover some of the effects that pregnancy has on a woman’s musculoskeletal system. Hopefully you will see how massage can benefit and give much needed relief to the expecting mother to be.

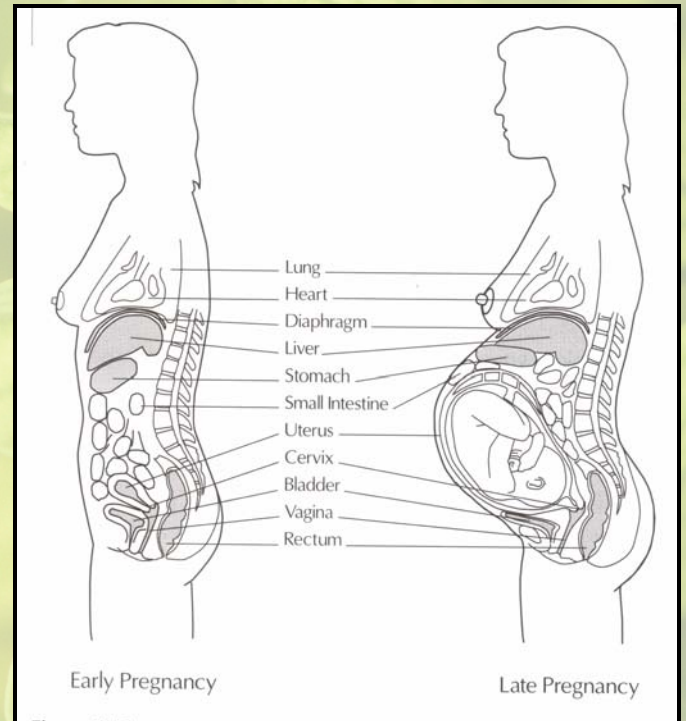
During pregnancy, the increasing levels of estrogen and progesterone in the woman’s body has many effects:

- nausea during the first few months
- increased nasal stuffiness
- enlarged and congested breasts
- relaxation of smooth muscle (bladder, gastrointestinal tract, blood vessels).

In addition, the pregnancy hormone *relaxin* has a ... well ... *relaxing* effect on all the ligaments, fascia and joint capsules in the body, particularly in the pelvis – this is all in preparation for ease of passage of the baby through the birth canal. Unfortunately, the weight bearing joints such as the ankles, feet, and low back may be achey and sore much of the time as a result of the loosening of joints.

A woman’s uterus is normally about the size of a fist, but by 16 weeks, it has enlarged to fill most of the pelvic cavity even though the fetus is only about 12 cm. This is due to the fully formed placenta, increasing volume of amniotic fluid, and actual growth of the uterine muscle itself. As pregnancy continues, the uterus pushes higher and higher into the abdominal cavity, where the crowded abdominal organs exert pressure further upwards into the diaphragm (main breathing muscle) and thoracic cavity. Several things happen here ... the already flexible ribs flare out and widen the thorax, which can cause

pain at the sternum or along the spine. Downward movement of the diaphragm during respiration becomes inhibited due to the cramped conditions, and the woman can feel shortwinded throughout part of her pregnancy. The esophagus is displaced and the stomach is crowded and both these situations can result in heartburn symptoms. You can see in the picture below how this internal crowding looks (maximize pic size if needed).



As the increasing bulk of the belly changes the centre of gravity, the curvature in the lumbar spine becomes more accentuated. With the pelvic ligaments and pubic symphysis relaxing, widening, and becoming more flexible, the surrounding muscles can go into spasm with the stress of lending additional support to these joints. Sciatic pain is a common symptom experienced during



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pregnancy, and you may also notice an emerging and distinctive waddling gait during this time! Mothers-to-be are instructed to sleep on their side, which can cause additional hip discomfort and sometimes bursitis from the unaccustomed pressure. *Fascial and Swedish massage techniques can give much needed relief to all these symptoms and areas mentioned so far.*

Edema (swelling) occurs commonly in the feet, ankles, and legs due to increased water uptake in the digestive system and because the mechanical obstruction of the uterus reduces venous pressure below the pelvis. Edema can also be evident in the hands and face, and can cause compression syndromes such as carpal tunnel. *Lymphatic drainage is an excellent therapy* for reducing excessive fluid that has accumulated in the tissues. For the tender and congested breasts, *a wonderful hydrotherapy treatment* that can be done at home is to take a small sheet or long towel, wet it in cold water and wind it between and around the breasts in a figure eight.

Fun Fact: Ever wonder why pregnant women have to pee so often? The growing uterus compresses the bladder, the kidneys are producing and removing more urine for the fetus, and progesterone has relaxed the smooth muscle – all of which results in frequent and sometimes urgent urination.

Due to the holiday season, the next newsletter will be in February. My office will be closed from December 23, 2006 to January 1, 2007, except for Saturday December 30th (yes, I'm working that day!). I'll be officially reopened in the New Year on January 2nd, so come on in and get a hot stone massage!

Happy Hannukah, Feliz Navidad, Joyeux Noel, Milad Majid, Zalig Kerstfeast, Buone Feste Natalizie, Srozhdestvom Kristovym, Naya Saal Mubarak Ho.

BE SAFE, BE HAPPY, MERRY CHRISTMAS AND LOVE TO ALL!