How to Deal With Fibromyalgia During Pregnancy

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Finding Safe Ways to Deal With Pain and Discomfort

Fibromyalgia doesn't appear to interfere with fertility, but pregnancy affects every system in the body, and since the pain and discomfort of fibromyalgia is also widespread, you can be in for a bumpy ride once you conceive.

The first step is to build a good support network, and then learn how pregnancy can affect your chronic pain. With some careful planning and adjustments, you can ease the discomfort of pregnancy and enjoy a safe and healthy postpartum life with your baby.

How Fibromyalgia and Pregnancy Interact

Generally, fibromyalgia symptoms will worsen with pregnancy — especially in the final months. A good deal of the discomfort is due to pregnancy weight gain, as even a moderate increase can put pressure on the hip joints and the lower back — a particularly problematic area for fibromyalgia sufferers.

Fibromyalgia can affect the symptoms and processes of pregnancy, too. Some recent studies found women with fibromyalgia were more likely to experience certain pregnancy complications, like miscarriage, excessive amniotic fluid, blood sugar imbalance, and babies with lower birth weight, though your general state of health and medical history are also factors.

Treating Fibromyalgia During Pregnancy

Most fibro medications are not approved for use during pregnancy, mainly because there have been few studies on the possible side effects. Doctors will always choose low-risk alternatives to powerful drugs, although they may adjust their usual approach if your unique set of circumstances demands it.

The best treatments are gentle therapies you can practice frequently. Since stress, fatigue and muscle aches are at the heart of most fibro discomfort during pregnancy, you'll need to address these with rest, movement and pain relief — in the right proportions:

- **Calculated rests –** When you deal with two fatiguing conditions, you need lots of rest to maintain mobility and function — probably more than you think. Experts suggest you take 20 to 30 minutes, three times each day to really rest your muscles. You can get even more benefit with some simple heat treatment during a rest break; relax in a warm bath or apply warm compresses to your aching muscles while you kick your feet up for a while.

- **Appropriate exercise –** Exercise increases serotonin, a neurotransmitter that keeps you content and emotionally energized. A healthy, stable level of serotonin can counter the damaging consequences of the stress that comes with a chronic condition and the physiological changes of pregnancy.
- **Gentle painkillers –** Acetaminophen is generally chosen as the painkiller for pregnancy, since it carries

very little risk to the fetus. Of course, every medication can have problematic side effects, especially when your body is more sensitive to stimuli. Talk to your doctor about an appropriate dose during each trimester of pregnancy.

Fibromyalgia and Postpartum Life

Many women suffer from fibromyalgia flares after the baby is born, especially during the first few months when sleep suffers most. However, symptoms usually begin to return to pre-pregnancy levels after the first six months or so when you may resume your pre-pregnancy treatment plan — although some medications will still be off limits if you decide to breastfeed.

Finally, don’t discount your psychological health — be sure to report any emotional strain that comes with your physical discomfort, since postpartum depression could hide behind fibromyalgia symptoms, and burden you with unnecessary challenges if it goes untreated.