

## Physical changes in the childbearing year and their possible consequences:

- Blood volume increases, which causes swelling
- Hormone levels change, which may cause lower back or pelvic pain, changes in digestion, and headaches
- The rib cage expands, which puts pressure on nerves and tissues above and between ribs
- This can cause difficulty with deep breathing, general discomfort in the trunk area, and mid/upper back pain
- Weight gain puts extra stress on feet, legs and back. The forward weight of the baby changes spinal curves and can weaken overstretched abdominal muscles
- As your breasts grow, larger breasts may alter posture
- A vaginal delivery can cause injury to the pelvic floor, which for some can cause pain, incontinence, and other urinary problems
- A cesarean delivery can cause scarring, weak abdominal muscles, and pain

### Pelvic Organ Prolapse

When pregnancy and childbirth weaken the pelvic floor muscles, one or more of the organs they support—the uterus, bladder, and bowel—can slip out of place. Rehabilitating these muscles can help prevent or improve this condition.

Physical therapists are also experts in the field of fitness, prevention, and wellness. Because PTs are experts in knowing how the body works, they can design a personalized treatment plan to fit your needs. Whether you are a marathoner, an avid gardener, or a couch potato looking to make better lifestyle choices, a PT can help you get your body back, and/or prepare it for future pregnancies. Pre-surgical physical therapy is often utilized and covered under insurance for surgeries of the knee or shoulder, for example. Most women will report that giving birth, either vaginally or by C-section, is one of the most physically demanding, marathon-like events of their life. However, very few women receive physical therapy to prepare their bodies for and recover after childbirth. This unfortunate oversight must end.

## Physical therapy during pregnancy and the post-partum period



Lewis County General Hospital  
Rehabilitation Department  
7785 N State Street  
Lowville, Ny 13367  
315-376-5225

## A referral to Physical Therapy would be appropriate for Women with:

- Lower back pain
- Pelvic pain
- Tendonitis
- Shoulder/arm pain and tingling
- Upper back and neck pain
- Headaches
- Incontinence
- Urgency of urination
- Pain associated with scars
- Leg/foot pain, weakness, and/or swelling
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Hip pain
- Pain with intercourse
- Musculoskeletal issues related to bed rest

- Diastasis recti (separation of the abdominal muscles)
- Prolapse (lack of support in the pelvic area that allows the organs, like the uterus, to fall from their normal position)
- Coccydynia (tailbone pain)

Which postpartum problems can be helped by pelvic rehab?

The following conditions can be related to problems with the pelvic floor. These problems are particularly

common in postpartum moms, but they can last beyond the first six months after giving birth or strike later in some women.



### Urinary Difficulties

Women with urinary incontinence leak urine when they sneeze, cough, or run. Some women feel a frequent or sudden, compelling urge to pee, even when their bladder isn't full. Others are unable to start the flow of urine at will or empty their bladder completely when urinating.

### Anal Incontinence

Many postpartum women have trouble controlling gas or bowel movements.

### Perineal Pain

This is common in postpartum women, especially those who tore during childbirth or are recovering from an episiotomy. (The perineum is the area of skin between the vagina and the anus.) A tight pelvic floor causes some to experience persistent perineal pain, even after their wound heals.

### Pelvic Pain

Some women have pain during sex for many months or even years after childbirth. And some have chronic pain, itching, or burning in their vulva the tissue surrounding the opening of the vagina. This can make it hard to tolerate wearing tight clothing and even underwear. Others have pain during bowel movements. These symptoms are often caused by tight pelvic floor muscles, which can lead to inflamed tissue and nerve endings.