ONGOING NZ RESEARCH SHOWS BENEFITS OF CHIROPRACTIC CARE DURING PREGNANCY

Ongoing New Zealand research is uncovering new evidence about how chiropractic care can help to make giving birth an easier, safer experience for pregnant women and reduce the need for pharmaceuticals in the crucial months leading up to childbirth. And according to the New Zealand Chiropractors’ Association the discoveries are all the more relevant now that common pain relief such as paracetamol has been shown to have detrimental effects on unborn children1.

According to NZCA spokesman and chiropractor Dr Hayden Thomas: ‘Chiropractic care can benefit all aspects of your body's ability to be healthy by optimising brain-body communication through the nervous system. Our modern lifestyles mean that these spinal communication systems are often dysfunctional due to postural stresses, altered spinal curves, misalignment, joint restrictions and imbalances in the surrounding muscles, ligaments and other tissues. Altered spinal structure and neurological function can have profound effects in pregnant women meaning that they may experience more discomfort during pregnancy and often require assisted labour.’

Dr Thomas adds that ‘A sedentary lifestyle and some injuries can lead to pelvic fixation, causing tightening or torsion of specific pelvic muscles and ligaments. These tense muscles and ligaments and their constraining effect on the uterus can prevent a baby from comfortably assuming the best possible position for birth, potentially making it more difficult for the mother to give birth.’

Director of Research at the New Zealand College of Chiropractic’s Research Centre, Dr Heidi Haavik explains: ‘The female pelvic floor muscles are very much controlled at a subconscious level by the brain. If these muscles do not function in an ideal manner this can have severe consequences to a woman’s ability to give birth naturally. Abnormal pelvic floor muscle function is also linked with conditions such as stress urinary incontinence, which can cause great suffering for women.’

In her groundbreaking new book, The Reality Check2 Dr Haavik explains what happens in the brain when a chiropractor adjusts specific dysfunctional segments in the spine. It is based on Dr Haavik’s work over the past two decades, which has been instrumental in establishing the link between neuroscience and chiropractic.

Altered weight bearing and movement patterns during pregnancy can place additional pressure on the muscles, ligaments, joints, discs and bones of a woman’s spine and can uncover regions that are not working well. 50% of women experience significant levels of back or pelvic pain during their pregnancy leading many of them them to resort to pain relief such as paracetamol. But research shows that chiropractic care may help to relieve these symptoms in up to 85% of pregnant women.3,4

Dr Haavik has been looking at how chiropractic care may influence pelvic floor muscle function in healthy women before, during, and after childbirth, and the results of one of these studies are due to be published soon.

Dr Haavik points out: ‘We have been working with a number of pregnant and non-pregnant women here in New Zealand to find out how chiropractic adjustments alter the way the pelvic floor muscles work.’

Dr Haavik added: ‘We know that women experience on average a 24% reduction in the length of labour time with chiropractic care during pregnancy
and that rises to a 33% reduction for those mothers who have given birth before. By altering the biomechanics and neuromuscular control of the pelvis we are likely enabling the muscles to become more relaxed and joints more mobile which probably helps them to expand more freely during labour and settle more easily afterwards.’

Dr Thomas says: ‘This improves the ease of delivery, creating less stress and pressure for both the mother and baby. This also means there is less likelihood or need to use interventions such as forceps or cesarean section which can impact upon both mother and newborn child. C-sections have become increasingly common over the last few decades, and now account for as many as one in four births. While they are a necessary and safe option in some high-risk or complicated cases, studies show that natural and drug-free births are safer and healthier in both the short and long term.’

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2 http://heidihaavik.com/pages/book


4 http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2647084/


6 http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10681262

7 http://www.childbirthconnection.org/article.asp?ck=10166

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