

breathe properly. On a mental level, it produces a calmer and clearer state of mind enabling us to be less driven by conflicting impulses.

The aim of the Alexander technique is to teach and improve awareness of the body and posture. The basic principle is that if you can get rid of excess tension in your body and allow the body to adopt a natural, upright stance, with the joints moving freely and the muscles relaxed, everything else in the body will work efficiently, promoting a general feeling of well-being and health.

## THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE AND PREGNANCY

Here's how this technique can help with the most common problems.

### Backache

It is widely accepted that backache is a 'normal' part of pregnancy and a few common exercises are suggested for alleviating the pain. In most cases, backache is produced by long-term misuse of the body. Embarking on exercises without a clear understanding of how to 'use' the 'self' may reinforce misuse and may make matters worse.

Your back is vulnerable during pregnancy because of the ligaments softening in your lower back, plus you have the added weight of your growing baby. The Alexander technique focuses on teaching the correct alignment of the head, neck and back, which strengthens your back to deal with the added weight. It also works at showing you how to use your hips and legs properly, which helps reduce tension in the lower back and upper legs.

### Varicose veins

Varicose veins sometimes begin or worsen during pregnancy. The change is usually attributed to two causes. First, more of the hormone progesterone is secreted during pregnancy, relaxing the walls of the veins, causing them to soften and swell, resulting in the 'pooling' of blood and damage to the veins. Secondly, the ever-increasing size of the baby increases the pressure on the pelvic veins and slows the return of blood from the legs to the heart. This causes pressure to build up in the veins of the legs and in some cases, in the vaginal area. Alexander work will help alleviate it, as it promotes efficient functioning of the circulatory system. It will also help to release tension in your legs and hips, which allows better blood circulation throughout the body.

### Haemorrhoids or piles

These are varicose veins in the rectum, often caused by constipation, a common niggle in pregnancy. Improving posture will aid digestion and movement of the gut. Constipation is often caused by the mom's upper body 'collapsing' downwards onto her bump.

### Heartburn, nausea and vomiting

These complaints are also related to hormonal changes and the growth of the uterus, but can be exacerbated by body misuse.

To treat them, an Alexander teacher will encourage you to lengthen your body and to 'think tall', which will help reduce these uncomfortable symptoms.

### Pelvic pain

Pelvic pain is caused by irritation of the nerves as the baby's head drops, or by the ligaments softening around the pubic bone, making the area vulnerable to pulls and strains. An Alexander teacher will take an overall look at your body and teach you ways of adopting a relaxed posture, and how to avoid jerky movements.

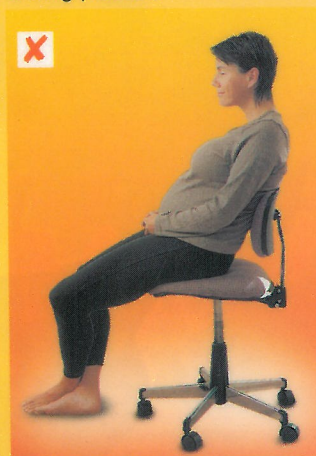
## Carpel tunnel syndrome

This condition is experienced as tingling fingers, thought to be caused by a combination of water retention and a temporary disruption of the nerves' impulses to the fingers, again caused by pregnancy hormones. Alexander teachers will suggest specific ways of moving your hands and arms, focusing on helping you release tensions in your shoulders and upper arms so that the blood and nerve supply to your hands and fingers is not obstructed. You can also try adopting the following good habits:

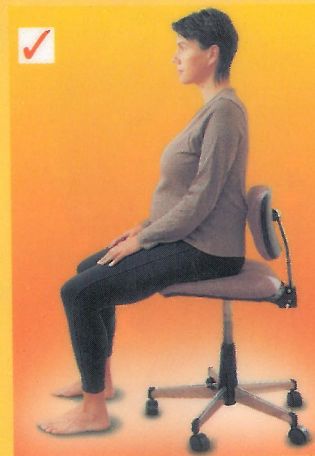
### When sitting down:

- Sit on a hard dining room chair which supports your back and allows you to place your feet flat on the ground. This will encourage your back to lengthen.
- Imagine your head is poised, slightly forward at the top of your spine, with no tension held in either the neck or the throat.
- Practice sitting on your 'sitting' bones, the two big bones in your bottom. This will allow your lower back to release and your hips to be free, relieving any tension in your lower body.
- Keep your arms relaxed, hands and fingers loosely held on your lap. Remember, if it hurts, get up and move around. Don't sit for too long.

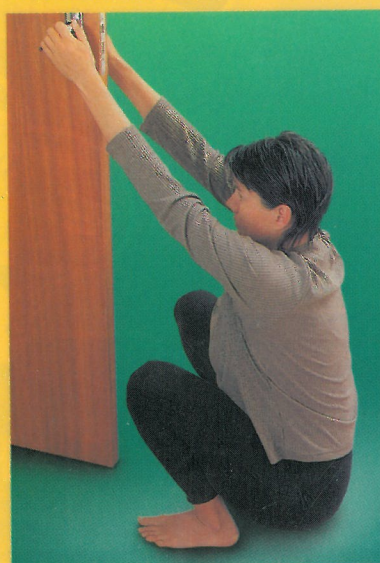
### Sitting posture



The slouch – your back's worst enemy. The spine is unsupported, and this can lead to weakness in the lower lumbar area.



Sitting smart! The spine, internal organs and the baby are supported. Sitting like this, your blood circulation is aided so you'll feel more alert, and you won't develop stiffness in your neck and shoulders.



This fabulous stretch releases tension in the lower back, using gravity to create a traction effect in the back.