

■ LIFESTYLE : 84-year-old creates the BellySling to ease pregnancy discomforts



Retired RN Jean Macdougall demonstrates her invention for pregnant woman, the BellySling.

SUSAN BRADNAM The London Free Press

Take a load off

After an active career as a registered nurse and day-care operator, Jean Macdougall could be putting her feet up and enjoying retirement. At 84, she has been helping people for many decades.

But the Port Stanley woman is not one to rest and let someone else worry about an individual's well-being and health.

"I get irritated at people who could make a difference," she says, but don't.

"I can't do nothing. I think too much."

So despite the fact she doesn't have children and is at an age where it can be difficult to push yourself to do more, Macdougall is aiding pregnant women.

"I'm worried about them," she says.

What Macdougall particularly fears is the stress and strain on



Kathy Rumleski
MOTHERLOAD

pregnant women's backs and the long-term consequences of the weakening of muscles.

She has created the BellySling which she says is designed to relieve back and sciatic pain, support stressed abdominal muscles and ease pregnancy discomforts.

The BellySling is worn under the abdomen, around a woman's sides where there is no swelling from the fetus, and attached at the small of the back. "There shouldn't be any pressure on the fetus, but (the abdomen) needs support," Macdougall explains.

Lifting the belly off the groin area aids in the circulation of

legs and therefore can reduce varicose veins as well, she says.

Our whole body is impacted by our pregnancies and the feeling of pressure from the growing baby sometimes makes us feel as if our skin is about to break. Talk about Mother Load.

And being vain, sometimes we fuss about those stretch marks we're left with long after delivery.

Macdougall says stretch marks can be reduced by the BellySling because our abdomens don't sink. "You don't get dragged down for hours."

She gets exasperated that more isn't done to support pregnant women, on many levels, but her action plan is on the physical plane.

Macdougall says women should be thinking long-term about what weak muscles and what lack of support for the

pelvic floor leads to. "I'm talking about leakage (incontinence), which nobody wants to hear about. What happens with leakage is that people are too embarrassed to go out. They stay home and become depressed and isolated. The doctor reaches for his prescription pad. A tranquilizer or anti-depressant affects the feet. It dulls everything so you don't feel the pain. It dulls the feet."

That can lead to falls and then women become limited and fragile, she says.

"I go into a care home and everybody is in their wheelchair." She believes many of these issues could be avoided or at least minimized with a BellySling.

She is so sure the product will make a difference to women that she recently created a video and is sending it to Dr. Oz, who has

his own daily TV show produced by Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Productions. "There are very few doctors who are willing to teach at the level that Oz teaches."

Before going into production, Macdougall tested out her creation with the Thames Valley Midwives and was given the thumbs up.

Free Press reporter Kelly Pedro, who wore the BellySling briefly for our photo shoot, said it did ease the pressure on her back and made her walk straighter.

"I would purchase one if it wasn't so late in my pregnancy," said Pedro who is only a couple of weeks away from her due date.

Macdougall's idea for her product came after watching employees at her childcare centre who were pregnant and looking after small children.

She figured she could help

them.

"I'm practical," she says, and thus, she started work on her BellySling.

The BellySling can be separated and used if you have multiple fetuses.

It can be purchased at Cheeky Monkey and Tummies to Tots in London and Yurek Pharmacy in St. Thomas and also on Macdougall's website, www.bellysling.com.

Macdougall works with partners Mellanie Stephens and Betty Hansen, who are also involved with a similar product for anyone who needs back support, including men, called Align-A-Spine.

For more information about Align-A-Spine, call 519-782-4712.

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