

Concerns and Discomforts of Pregnancy

During pregnancy, you may have some concerns and discomforts as your body changes. Try these basic tips and talk to your doctor or nurse for more advice. Do not use any over the counter medicine or herbs without talking to your doctor first.

Nausea

Nausea or feeling sick to your stomach is often called morning sickness. Some women also have heartburn or a burning sensation in their stomach, throat or chest. This is common during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. To improve your signs:

- Try to eat crackers, dry toast or cereal before getting out of bed in the morning. These foods may help any time of the day you have nausea.
- Eat smaller meals more often instead of 3 large meals.
- Do not let your stomach get completely empty.
- Avoid lying down, sleeping or exercising for 1 hour after eating.
- Avoid high fat, fried, spicy, acidic or greasy foods. Avoid caffeine.
- Sleep with your head raised up on a pillow.
- When bending over, bend at your knees and not your waist
- **Call your doctor** if you are not able to keep fluids down for over 24 hours, you have dark urine or you feel weak or dizzy.

Exercise, Energy and Sleep

Feeling tired is common, but exercise can help to strengthen muscles during pregnancy and for delivery. To improve your energy:

- Exercise each day if allowed by your doctor. Talk with your doctor about the type of exercise you are doing.
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes 4 to 5 days of the week, if you are allowed to exercise. Talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise program.
- Rest often. Lie down on your left side for at least 1 hour during the day to increase blood flow to your baby. A pillow between your legs and under your abdomen may increase comfort.
- If you have trouble sleeping, try a warm (not hot) bath or shower before bedtime. You may also want to practice relaxation exercises such as meditation, deep breathing and stretching.

Oral Health

- Visit a dentist at least 1 time during pregnancy.
- Tell your dentist if you have gum or teeth problems.
- Use a soft toothbrush and brush gently. Floss each day.
- If you have vomiting from nausea, rinse your mouth with 1 cup of water mixed with 1 teaspoon of baking soda. This will get rid of stomach acid in the mouth.
- Do not use tobacco products.

Headaches and Dizziness

- For a headache, call your doctor or nurse for over the counter medicines that are safe to take. **Do not** take aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve).
- If you feel dizzy, sit or lie down to avoid falling. Get up slowly after 15 minutes to see if the dizziness has passed.
- Change positions slowly when you have a headache or feel dizzy.
- **Call your doctor** if your headache or dizziness does not go away or gets worse, or you have blurred vision, eye pain or pressure, or a lot of swelling in your hands or feet.

Nose Stuffiness and Nose Bleeds

- You may put saline drops or gel into your nose. Talk with your doctor before taking any other over the counter medicines.
- To stop a nosebleed, sit up, lean your head forward and apply firm pressure with your fingers to the side of the nose that is bleeding. Get medical care if the bleeding lasts longer than 20 minutes.

Skin, Hair and Nails

- Your hair and nails may grow faster. If you plan to get your hair treated with chemicals, tell your hairdresser that you are pregnant.
- Common skin problems include changes in skin color, itchy skin, acne and stretch marks. Topical lotions or ointments may be used for itchy skin or reduce the appearance of stretch marks.
 - Do not use Accutane or Retin-A products when pregnant.
- **Call your doctor** if you have concerns.

Breasts are tender or leak milk

- Wear a support bra that fits comfortably, such as a sports bra. Some women also wear a bra without underwire to bed at night.
- If your breasts leak milk, wear nursing pads in your bra and change them when you feel or think you are damp.
- Tell your doctor if you feel a lump or have any nipple changes.

Urinating Often or Urine Leaks

You may have to pass urine more often throughout your pregnancy. Leaking urine is common during the last months of pregnancy. Urine leaks happen with coughing, sneezing, picking up heavy objects or sexual activity during pregnancy.

- Do not limit liquid or water intake, but drink less before bedtime.
- Urinate often.
- Avoid liquids with caffeine.
- Do Kegel exercises to strengthen and control the muscles around the vagina.
 - › To locate these muscles, stop and start your urine when you use the toilet.
 - › Try to tighten the muscles a small amount at a time. Then release very slowly.
 - › As you tighten the muscles, you should feel the area from your urethra, where urine leaves your body, lift slightly.
 - › Practice these exercises while you sit, stand, walk, drive or watch television.
 - › Do these exercises 10 times, 5 to 10 times a day.
- **Call your doctor** if you have burning or pain when urinating or have a fever.
- **Call your doctor** if you think you may be leaking amniotic fluid and not urine. Lie down for 30 minutes with an absorbent pad. If you feel liquid when standing up, and it is yellow, pink or brown in color, call your doctor.

Vaginal Drainage

A change in vaginal drainage is normal.

- Bathe the outer vaginal area often. Use soap without perfume. Rinse well.
- Do not use tampons, vaginal sprays, douches, powders and colored or perfumed toilet paper.
- Wear cotton underwear. Avoid nylons or panty hose and tight pants.
- **Call your doctor** if the drainage has a bad odor, causes itching or there is blood.

Constipation or Diarrhea

Constipation is very common in pregnancy from changes in body hormones. Diarrhea can be from changes in diet, exercise or prenatal vitamins, or an infection.

Constipation

- Drink 6 to 8 cups of liquids each day. Choose water, juices and milk.
- Eat high fiber foods such as raw fruits and vegetables, whole grains, high-fiber bran cereals and cooked dried beans.
- Do not use laxatives, enemas or over the counter medicines unless your doctor says that it is okay.
- **Call your doctor** if your constipation does not get better in 2 days.

Diarrhea

- Drink 8 to 12 cups of water, broth, or sports drinks that are low in sugar. Avoid juices and milk that can make diarrhea worse. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Eat bananas, rice, applesauce, toast, yogurt, non-milk based soups, potatoes, crackers, oatmeal, low sugar and low fiber cereals, and lean protein, such as chicken, turkey, beef, pork, cooked eggs or tofu.
- **Call your doctor** if diarrhea does not get better in 2 days, have pain or cramps that get worse, or are bleeding from the rectum. If you have diarrhea 2 days or more, use an oral rehydration product, such as Pedialyte®.

Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are swollen blood vessels in the rectal area from constipation or pressure of the baby on the body during pregnancy.

- Eat whole grain and high fiber foods, such as raw fruits and vegetables. Drink more water and fruit juice in moderation to keep your bowel movements regular and soft.
- Do not strain or push when having a bowel movement.
- Use cold compresses to relieve pain or swelling.
- Talk with your doctor about using a topical cream or witch hazel to reduce pain
- **Call your doctor** if your pain increases or if you have bleeding.

Back Pain and Leg Cramps

Most women have back pain as the body changes with your baby's growth. Leg cramps are common during pregnancy.

Back pain

- When resting or sleeping, use a supportive mattress. Lie on your left side with pillows between the knees, behind the back and under the stomach.
- Stand up straight. Do not slump or slouch.

- Wear low heeled, walking shoes.
- Do not stand in one place too long. Change body positions every 30 minutes.
- Squat to pick up objects rather than bending at the waist. Do not bend over at the waist. Bend your knees.

Leg cramps

- Increase fluid, calcium and potassium intake in your diet. Eat foods such as milk, yogurt, bananas and orange juice.
- Rest often with your legs up during the day. Place a pillow under knees and ankles when sitting or lying down.
- During a leg cramp, straighten your leg and bend your foot up toward the front of your leg to gently stretch the muscles.
- **Call your doctor** if only one leg is hurting all the time, if there is a hot or red area on the leg, or if the leg hurts when you bend your foot toward the front of your leg.

Varicose Veins

Varicose veins are enlarged veins you may see on your legs. They can itch, be painful or cause tingling in the legs.

- Avoid nylons or panty hose with elastic bands.
- Wear low heeled or athletic shoes. Avoid high heels.
- If you must stand for long amounts of time, consider wearing support hose to improve blood flow from the legs back to the heart.
- Take short rest breaks with your legs raised higher than your heart. Lie on your left side with a pillow between your legs and under your abdomen.
- Do not cross your legs when sitting.

Swelling of Hands and Feet

- Avoid standing or sitting for long periods of time.
- Lie on your left side for 30 to 60 minutes, 3 to 4 times each day.
- Exercise if allowed by your doctor.
- Avoid foods high in salt.
- Drink 8 to 10 glasses of fluid each day.
- Ask your doctor about support hose.
- **Call your doctor** if you wake up in the morning a few days in a row with swelling.

Cold, Flu or a Virus

- Talk with your doctor about getting a vaccine to protect you from the flu. **When pregnant, you need the injection (shot) and not the nasal spray.**
- Call your doctor or nurse for over the counter medicines that are safe to take if you get a cold or have the flu.
- Avoid being around people who are ill. Wash your hands often.
- **Call your doctor** if you have a fever, shortness of breath or are coughing up sputum.

Abdominal Pain or Contractions

You may feel some pain in the groin area as your uterus grows. This pain can get worse with sudden movements or prolonged walking.

- **Call your doctor right away** if you have severe pain.
- Braxton Hicks Contractions are mild contractions that are painless and irregular. These are common and do not need treatment.
- When you have a contraction, lie on your left side and rest. Place your hands on your abdomen and feel when the contraction begins and ends. Time how long and how often the contractions are coming.
- **If you are less than 9 months pregnant** and are having contractions, quickly drink several glasses of water. If you still have 4 or more contractions in one hour after drinking the water and resting, call your doctor.
- **If you are in your ninth month of pregnancy**, call your doctor if your contractions are occurring more than 6 per hour, last longer than 15 to 30 seconds, become painful, or you have vaginal bleeding or leak fluid.
- Your doctor may tell you to call right away if you have any contractions.

Sexual Activity

It is common to have some changes in your sexual desire during pregnancy.

- Sexual intercourse is allowed during your pregnancy unless your doctor has told you otherwise. Tell your partner what feels comfortable.
- Practice safe sex if you or your partner has a sexually transmitted infection.
- You may feel some cramping for a few minutes after sexual intercourse.
- **Call your doctor** if after sexual intercourse you have vaginal bleeding, leak urine or your water breaks.

Changes in Mood and Memory

It is common to have mood swings from hormones, changes in sleep or eating patterns, or stress during pregnancy.

- It is normal to have different emotions during pregnancy. You may be excited about the birth of your baby, but worry how your life will change. Ask your partner, family and friends for emotional support.
- Manage stress in your life. Deep breathing, meditation, listening to music, exercise, and massage can help to reduce stress.
- If you have trouble eating and sleeping, this can change how you feel. Talk with your doctor and a dietitian to get help.
- You may notice that you are more forgetful. Make notes for yourself to help you remember important things. This should improve after the birth of your baby.
- **Call your doctor** if you have thoughts of harming yourself or others, or feel you may have depression.

Food Cravings and Aversions

You may crave foods during pregnancy while the smell or taste of other foods may cause nausea.

- Eat a variety of healthy foods at meals and for snacks, include fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein. Avoid foods high in sugar, fat or salt and make healthier choices.
- Take a prenatal vitamin each day.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.