

Morning sickness / Nausea

Although nausea is more common in the morning and early stages of pregnancy, it can happen at any time of the day, or any stage of the pregnancy. It usually starts at about the sixth week and settles by about 14 to 16 weeks. The cause is unknown, though it has been linked to the changes in hormone levels during pregnancy.

Suggestions that may help:

- Women experiencing nausea and vomiting of pregnancy may discontinue iron-containing prenatal vitamins during the first trimester and substitute them with folic acid or adult or children's vitamins low in iron
- Ginger may be beneficial in ameliorating the symptoms of nausea and vomiting of pregnancy
- Acupressure may help some women in the management of nausea and vomiting of pregnancy
- B 6 vitamin (40 to 80 mg / day) may be beneficial eat small meals and snacks frequently; feeling empty or hungry can make the nausea worse
- drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration; try cordial, juices, soups, icy poles or jelly, lemonade, dry ginger ale, soda or mineral waters
- eat a high protein snack before bed or during the night. Carbs make you feel better for a short time, but adding protein will keep nausea away for longer.
- avoid anything that may trigger your nausea such as: rich, spicy, or fatty foods; and strong food smells, coffee, tea, alcohol or tobacco smoke
- sudden movements such as jumping out of bed or racing to the shower can make you feel sick too
- get plenty of rest as nausea is often worse when you are tired.
- stop taking your prenatal vitamin and take folic-acid only (at least 0.4mg).

If nothing works, you feel exhausted, or you are vomiting and losing weight, speak with your midwife. There are medications available for controlling morning sickness that are safe in pregnancy.

Constipation

Progesterone, one of the main pregnancy hormones, enhances absorption of sodium and water in the colon and as well slows down the emptying of the intestine.

It will help to:

- make sure you include plenty of fibre in your diet e.g. fresh fruit and vegetables, wholemeal breads and breakfast cereals, dried fruit, nuts and legumes. Watermelon is a great fruit to eat if constipated
- take a fibre supplement such as psyllium
- drink plenty of water and fluids
- exercise regularly. Laxatives should be avoided until discussed with your doctor or midwife.

Constipation can sometimes be caused by taking iron tablets - ask your midwife if you can change to a different type.

Food cravings

Some women experience food cravings during pregnancy. We don't really understand the reason for this but, interestingly, the cravings are often for foods that we seem to need, such as milk (we need more calcium during pregnancy), or tomatoes and oranges (vitamin C requirements double during pregnancy).

Taste changes and food aversions

Women sometimes find that foods taste different or they 'go off' certain foods such as tea, coffee and meat. This usually settles down as the pregnancy progresses so if you have found it difficult to eat particular foods that are important for your diet, you may like to try them again later in the pregnancy

Heartburn

Heartburn, more formally known as acid reflux is when the acid that is normally in your stomach backs up into your esophagus. It's super common in pregnancy due to hormonal changes that affect the digestive system and then later by the growing baby displacing your intestines and stomach upwards.

Symptoms of acid reflux include:

- A burning in your chest or throat
- An acidic taste in your mouth
- A gnawing sensation in your stomach
- Nausea

It will help to:

- eat small meals more frequently and slowly
- avoid fatty, fried or spicy food
- try slippery elm lozenges (Slippery elm is a gentle, safe herb made mostly of a type of carbohydrate that turns slippery when wet, Slippery elm helps to coat the lining of the esophagus and stomach, easing acid, and healing the tissue)
- sleep semi-upright, well supported by plenty of pillows
- eat a handful of almonds before you eat and before you go to bed
- drink apple cider vinegar – mix a tablespoon of all natural apple cider vinegar with a ¼ cup of water and drink.
- avoid drinking with meals.

If these measures don't help discuss with your midwife other options

Tiredness and difficulty sleeping

Growing a baby takes lots of extra energy! Most pregnant women experience difficulty sleeping in all the stages of pregnancy but as the pregnancy progresses sleep can become more and more difficult.

Good sleep tips to try:

- Try resting during the day with your legs raised
 - A nice warm bath to relax before bed with lavender can sometimes help
 - Lavender on your pillow
 - Increasing your magnesium intake can sometimes help
 - avoid stimulants such as tea or coffee
 - lie on one side with a pillow under your tummy and another between your knees
 - limit screen time before bed. The blue light emitted by screens on cell phones, computers, tablets, and televisions restrain the production of melatonin, the hormone that controls your sleep/wake cycle or circadian rhythm.
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Haemorrhoids

Progesterone, one of the main pregnancy hormones, causes the veins around the rectum to relax and along with lack of valves in these veins and with impaired venous return from the lower extremities hemorrhoids can develop. These swollen veins around the rectum and anus may itch, ache or feel sore. Constipation can make them worse.

It may help to:

- include plenty of fibre in the diet e.g. fruit and vegetables, wholemeal breads and breakfast cereals
- avoid standing for long periods
- avoid straining when sitting on the toilet
- try Witch Hazel wipes, tucks and/or warm soaks
- Preparation H is also safe to use in pregnancy

Talk to your midwife about a suitable ointment or suppository if bleeding and pain persist.

Varicose Veins

Progesterone, one of the pregnancy hormones, causes the veins to dilate and relax which slows the return of blood from your lower extremities which can contribute to varicose veins.

- elevate legs frequently
- walk daily
- put on support hose as soon as you wake up
- Don't sit or stand in the same position for more than one hour at a time.
- Do not cross your legs
- You may need to wear compression stockings – discuss with your midwife

Vaginal Infections

Almost all women have increased vaginal discharge during pregnancy. If the discharge smells unpleasant, causes soreness, itching or is discoloured, you may have a vaginal infection.

How to Promote healthy vaginal flora:

- Avoid sugary foods which interfere with healthy immune response and feed the infecting bacteria/yeast.
- Eat active culture unsweetened yogurt, 1/2 cup twice daily, and take a good quality probiotic daily. (If you are vegan or lactose intolerant you can skip the yogurt and just do the probiotic.)
- Eat fermented foods
- Apply 2 tablespoons of live active culture plain yogurt to the insides of the vaginal walls and to the outside surfaces to restore the natural flora of the vagina. Use clean fingers or an applicator (you can purchase one at your local pharmacy) to apply. Vegans can use probiotic capsules in the vagina, but the yogurt works much better – and it's not really eating it! Repeat twice daily.
- Take a daily probiotic containing Lactobacillus reuteri and rhamnosus species.
- Eat a healthy diet rich in fresh vegetables, good quality proteins from legumes, fish, poultry and meat, complex whole grains, nuts and seeds.

Avoid:

- Vaginal infection triggers: This includes anything that might trigger a chemical or allergic reaction, or mechanical irritation. Examples include tampons, bubble bath, douching, perfumed soaps and detergents, condoms, and thongs. Sugar, carbs, and alcohol also aggravate vaginal infections.
- Excess dampness down there by wearing loose fitting clothing made of natural fibers, and natural fiber breathable underwear.
- Sex – okay, just until the infection clears up and then for a few extra days – especially receiving oral sex which can change the vaginal pH.

Should you have an infection it is important to talk with your midwife so the infection can be identified and treatment can be commenced if required. Research shows that there is an increase in premature birth and premature rupture of the membranes (amniotic sac) when vaginal infections go left untreated in pregnancy.

Frequent Urination

Estrogen in pregnancy causes increased blood volume and increased filtration of the blood through the kidneys, blood volume peaks at an increase of 30 to 40% by the end of the second trimester. Drink lots of water in pregnancy. Do not try to limit fluid intake to control urination frequency as this is not the cause.

Preventing Bladder Infections Naturally

Bladder infections arise from bacteria in the bladder – usually E. coli, though there are a few other bothersome varieties, too. Kidney infections generally occur when bacteria from the bladder travels up the ureters, the tubes that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder.

General prevention suggestions

- Urinate after sex
- Stay well hydrated
- Wear underwear made of cotton avoid wearing thongs if you're prone to UTI's. (Think of them as a circus high wire for bacteria to walk across!)
- Wipe from front to back after a bowel movement – a lot of women do it the other way around and this can increase UTIs.
- Avoid bubble baths and vaginal hygiene products (i.e., douches), which increase irritation in the area and also damage the healthy vaginal flora.
- See info on how to promote healthy vaginal flora

Urinary Tract Infections

The most common symptoms of a bladder infection are

- frequent (and sometimes terribly painful) urination
- urgently needing to pee
- aching, cramping, or pressure above the pubic bone
- feeling tired, unwell, or low energy (malaise).
- You might notice blood in your urine (or on your toilet tissue), something up to 40% of women with a bladder infection experience.

Notify your midwife if you have these symptoms. Do not wait until your next appointment.

Muscle Cramps and Swelling

Muscle cramps in the foot, leg or thigh are very common during pregnancy, especially at night. The

cause of cramps is unclear.

To help relieve muscle spasm/cramp:

- massage and stretch the affected limb or muscle during the cramp often gives relief.

Swollen ankles, feet and fingers.

Eighty percent of pregnant women will experience swelling of this kind. There is extra fluid in the tissues of your body during pregnancy and some of it collects in your legs, particularly at the end of the pregnancy. If you stand for long periods of time, especially in hot weather, this fluid can cause swelling in the ankles and feet. It is more noticeable towards the end of the day and usually goes down at night while you sleep.

To relieve swelling:

- avoid prolonged standing
- rest frequently with feet elevated
- wear comfortable/loose shoes.

Tell your midwife if:

- the swelling is more than slight
 - it's not relieved by rest
 - you notice swelling in other parts of your body
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Broad and round ligament pain, muscle spasm/ pain in lower abdomen or side

Pressure of baby on nerves and pulling of growing uterus on ligaments; becomes worse as baby gets bigger and drops. Feels like sharp twinges/muscle pull usually on the right or left side of lower uterus.

- try soaking in a warm bath or putting a warm/wet towel or heating pad (on LOW) over the area.
 - Try and ice pak on the sore area
 - use pelvic rock exercise or knee-chest position to relieve pressure.
 - Support your abdomen with pillows when side-lying.
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Backache

Most women experience backache at some stage during their pregnancy. The causes include altered posture as the baby grows and hormonal changes leading to loosening of ligaments and greater water retention in the tissues. Backache is often worse at night contributing to sleeping difficulties, especially

during the later stages of pregnancy.

To prevent and relieve back pain:

- avoid heavy lifting and housework
 - avoid prolonged standing
 - rest frequently with legs elevated
 - be aware of your posture
 - use chairs with good back support for sitting
 - chiropractic care and or physiotherapy can sometimes help (choose practitioners who have experience working with pregnant women)
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Fainting

Some pregnant women will experience feeling faint. You're most likely to feel faint if you get up quickly from a chair or hot bath or if you stand for too long. Lie or sit down at the first sign of faintness. In late pregnancy, lying on your back can make you feel faint; you will feel better to turn onto your side.

Contact your midwife if you have frequent dizziness or fainting.

Itching

As your baby grows, the skin of your abdomen gets tighter and may cause mild itching. This is common in pregnancy.

- Stay well hydrated.
- Try changing your soap or using less.
- Blot your skin dry with a towel rather than rubbing.
- Take warm baths with oatmeal.
- Shea Butter or Coconut butter as a skin moisturizer. (the pure stuff not a lotion you find at the drugstore)

However, contact your doctor or midwife for persistent itching especially if it is on the hands or feet and / or if it keeps you up at night. Medication and further tests may be ordered.