

Coping With Common Discomforts of Pregnancy

[Pregnancy](#) produces many physical changes. Aside from weight and body shape, other alterations in your body chemistry and function take place. The heart works harder, your temperature registers slightly higher, body secretions increase, joints and ligaments are more flexible and hormones are altered.

Mood changes are common, resulting from a combination of hormonal changes and greater fatigue, as well as normal anxiety over body image, sexuality, finances, marriage roles and impending parenthood.

The following is a list of the most common discomforts of pregnancy and some guidelines for coping with them.

Nausea and Vomiting

- Eat small frequent meals. Going too long without eating during pregnancy can cause nausea or make it worse. If you experience continuous nausea, eat every one to two hours.
- Avoid greasy, high-fat foods. They are more difficult to digest.
- Consume dry starch foods, such as crackers, toast or cereal, in the morning before you get out of bed. Also, it helps if you stay in bed for 20 minutes or so after eating and get up slowly from the bed for a sudden change of position can aggravate nausea.
- Drinking carbonated beverages as well as peppermint, spearmint and chamomile teas may help.
- Eat plenty of carbohydrate-rich foods such as cereal, fruit, bread and rice. They are easy to digest and provide energy.
- Take prenatal vitamins only as directed. If they cause stomach upset, ask your practitioner if you can delay taking them for a few weeks.
- Some foods, such as milk or tea, that are soothing to one woman may be upsetting to another. However, most women find cold foods and beverages easier to tolerate than hot ones.
- Eat a high-protein snack before bed to stabilize blood sugar.
- Limit your consumption of coffee. It stimulates acid secretion, which can make the nausea worse.
- Consume liquids separately from meals, waiting about 20 to 30 minutes.
- Wear sea sickness wrist bands. These can be found at most pharmacies.

Constipation

- Increase the amount of fiber in your diet, eating foods high in fiber such as fruits, raw vegetables, whole grain products, nuts and dried fruits. Choose a breakfast cereal that has at least 5 grams of fiber per serving. These foods help soften the stool and promote natural bowel activity.
- Drink a lot of fluids.
- Exercise, even walking, will help relieve constipation.
- Eat prunes or figs, or drink prune juice. These fruits contain a natural laxative.
- Avoid laxatives. If the problem is not resolved with the above suggestions, let your health care practitioner know. Stool softeners that are safe during pregnancy can be prescribed.
- Iron supplements can aggravate constipation — the prescription for iron can be adjusted if it becomes a problem.

Hemorrhoids

- To help avoid hemorrhoids, prevent constipation by maintaining a diet that is high in fluids and fiber.
- Witch hazel or Tucks pads can be applied to the hemorrhoid area to relieve symptoms.
- Avoid over-the-counter laxatives. If hard stools are aggravating hemorrhoids, stool softeners can be used, but first consult your practitioner for specific suggestions.

Fatigue

This is very common during the first trimester. Get as much sleep or rest as you can — even short naps will help. Your energy level will pick up after the first three months. However, fatigue and insomnia tend to recur in the last months of pregnancy. A warm bath, massage or hot drink before bed often helps you relax and get ready to sleep.

Breast Tenderness

Breast tenderness is most pronounced during the first three months. The breasts enlarge in size and can be quite tender. Wearing a good support bra may help you feel more comfortable.

Frequent Urination

Frequent urination is another pregnancy symptom that is most pronounced during the first trimester as well as the end of pregnancy. Do not restrict fluid intake in an effort to decrease the frequency of urination. As long as you do not experience burning or pain with urination, increased frequency is normal and will go away with time.

Leg Cramps

Cramps in your calf or thigh occur most frequently at night. One remedy may be to increase your intake of calcium. Ask your provider about a calcium supplement. While in bed, stretch with your heels pointed, not your toes. This will help relieve a cramp.

Heartburn

- Try eating smaller but more frequent meals.
- Avoid highly seasoned, rich and fatty foods.
- Do not lie down flat after eating. If you must lie down, elevate your head and shoulders with pillows.
- Carbonated beverages and milk often can help alleviate heartburn.
- Certain antacids are not recommended during pregnancy. Check with your health care provider before using over-the-counter antacid preparations.

Backache

Lower back pain is common during pregnancy. It is caused by the shift in posture necessitated by carrying extra weight in front.

- Try not to stand in one position for too long.
- An exercise called the pelvic rock will help alleviate back pain and strengthen the lower back muscles that experience the most stress.
- Elevating the feet onto a stool while sitting will help.

Dizziness

Dizziness or lightheadedness can be caused by low blood sugar or a sudden change of position. To help avoid this feeling:

- Move slowly when getting up from a sitting or lying position.
- Eat well and frequently. Women who are prone to low blood sugar should carry snacks at all times. Juices and fruit are particularly good choices.

Swelling of the Hands and Feet

Slight swelling of the hands and feet are common in the later stages of pregnancy. Adequate fluid intake is always important. Improve the circulation in your legs and feet by elevating them as often as possible. Lie on a bed or floor and raise your legs up on the wall keeping your knees bent. If you are wearing elastic hose, drain your legs this way before putting them on.

Reviewed by health care specialists at UCSF Medical Center.

This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor or health care provider. We encourage you to discuss with your doctor any questions or concerns you may have.