

# 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.

## 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. It helps if you stay in bed for 20 minutes after eating and get up slowly to avoid sudden nausea
- ◆ Drinking carbonated beverages and 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
- ◆ 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 nausea worse
- ◆ Consume liquids separately from meals, waiting about 20 to 30 minutes
- ◆ Wear sea sickness wristbands that can be found at most pharmacies
- ◆ Use ginger products such as ginger candy, candied ginger, ginger ale, and Preggie Pops
- ◆ Eat dried papaya

## 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 3 months.

However, fatigue and insomnia tend to recur in the last months of pregnancy. A warm bath, massage, or hot drink before bed 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.

## DIZZINESS

**Dizziness or lightheadedness can be caused by low blood sugar or a sudden change in 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 good choices

## 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.

## CONSTIPATION

- Increase the amount of fiber in your diet by eating high-fiber foods such as fruits, raw vegetables, whole grain products, nuts, and dried fruits
  - Blueberries and pineapple have lots of fiber
  - Choose a breakfast cereal that has at least 5g of fiber per serving
  - These foods help soften the stool and promote natural bowel activity
- Drink a lot of fluids, especially water
- Exercise, even walking, will help relieve constipation
- Eat prunes or figs, they have a natural laxative
- Avoid laxatives. If the problem is not resolved with the above suggestions, let your health care practitioner know immediately. Stool softeners that are safe during pregnancy can be prescribed
- Iron supplements can aggravate constipation (The prescription can be adjusted if it becomes a problem)
- If you are taking the Medication Zofran for nausea, limit its use to only as needed since one of the side effects is constipation

## 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
- 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
- Wear supportive shoes
- Elevating the feet onto a stool while sitting
- Wear a maternity belt. This will help alleviate some of the strain on your lower back as your belly increases in size during your pregnancy
- Exercises such as pelvic tilts or yoga stretches such as child's pose, cat/cow, and downward facing dog will help alleviate back pain and strengthen the lower back muscles that experience the most stress

## 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 daily.

## LEG CRAMPS

- Cramps in your calf or thigh occur most frequently at night.
- One remedy may be to increase your intake of calcium
- Taking warm tub bath in the evening will help relax all of your muscles, including the muscles in your legs
- While in bed, stretch with your heels pointed, not your toes. This will help relieve a cramp

## SWELLING IN HANDS OR 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 while keeping your knees bent
- After a day at work, elevate your feet above the level of your heart by lying on the couch with your legs elevated.
- Remember, when lying on your back, you should lie with at least a 15 degree angle of elevation
- Get a maternity belt to wear while you are on your feet