



Discomforts of Pregnancy

■ Fatigue

Why does it happen?

- Diet (poor nutrition, low level of iron in blood)
- Body makes 40% more blood and heart pumps faster
- Liver, kidneys, and lungs work harder
- Hormonal changes
- Sleep disturbances
- Stress

What can I do about it?

- Respond to fatigue (nap!)
- Eat a well-balanced diet to maintain blood glucose levels and prevent anemia
- Participate in mild-to-moderate exercise such as swimming, walking, or stretching
- Use relaxation, breathing, meditation, or massage to decrease stress
- Plan quiet, relaxed activities just before bedtime (e.g. reading, warm shower)
- Avoid exercise and caffeine right before bed
- Get help with household chores



■ Headaches

Why does it happen?

- Hormonal changes
- Fatigue or stress
- Lowered blood glucose
- Hunger or dehydration
- Increased circulation and heart rate

What can I do about it?

- Do not skip meals
- Take walks in fresh air
- Take warm, soothing baths
- Practice yoga, meditation, relaxation, and breathing



!! Call your healthcare provider if headaches are severe or continuous OR if you have blurring of vision or spots before your eyes

■ Morning sickness

Nausea and vomiting at any time of the day

Why does it happen?

- Hormonal changes
- Decrease in stomach acid
- Other unknown reasons

What can I do about it?

- Eat a high protein snack before bed
- Eat a piece of toast or sip a hot drink before getting out of bed in the morning
- Eat 5 or 6 small meals each day rather than 3 large ones (to avoid an empty stomach)
- Try drinking lemonade, ginger ale, or carbonated beverages
- Avoid greasy, high-fat foods (eat low-fat protein-rich and carbohydrate-rich foods)
- Minimize exposure to strong odors
- Decrease or stop smoking
- Try Sea-Bands (for motion sickness)



!! Call your healthcare provider if you have severe vomiting or vomiting/diarrhea for more than 24 hours, abdominal pain, menstrual-like cramps, fainting or dizziness, or temp. over 100°F.

■ Frequent urination

Why does it happen?

- Growing uterus places pressure on the bladder
- Increase in body fluids



What can I do about it?

- Kegel exercises
- Maintain fluid intake despite frequent urination to prevent urinary tract infections (drink at least 8 glasses of water a day)

!! Call your healthcare provider if pain or burning occurs during urination (may be signs of a urinary tract infection).

■ Leaking urine

Especially when laughing or sneezing

Why does it happen?

- Pressure on bladder from growing uterus
- Weak pelvic floor muscles

What can I do about it?

- Empty bladder often
- Wear pantyliners
- Do Kegel exercises

!! Call healthcare provider if fluid other than urine is leaking from your vagina.

■ Increased vaginal discharge

Why does it happen?

- Hormonal changes

What can I do about it?

- Wear a pantyliner
- Maintain good personal hygiene

!! Call healthcare provider if discharge is bloody, if clear fluid is leaking from vagina, or if vaginal discharge is accompanied by itching or has a foul odor.

■ Heartburn

Feeling of fullness accompanied by burping up stomach acid; may be worse at night



Why does it happen?

- Hormonal changes cause the pyloric valve between the stomach and the esophagus to relax, so that the contents of stomach can be regurgitated back into the esophagus
- Growing uterus presses on the stomach which makes it easier for regurgitation to occur
- Acid in the stomach irritates the lining of the esophagus

What can I do about it?

- Eat 5 to 6 smaller meals a day instead of 3 large meals to prevent stomach from getting too full
- Sit upright after eating to allow time for food to be digested
- Don't eat right before bed and prop yourself up with pillows at night
- Avoid spicy foods if they are bothersome
- DO NOT take any over the counter medications for heartburn without talking with your healthcare provider first

!! Call your healthcare provider if you have chest pain.

■ Constipation

Why does it happen?

- Hormonal changes (progesterone decreases movement of smooth muscles, which slows emptying of stomach and decreases movement in the intestines)
- Growing uterus pushes intestines upward, which also decreases movement in the intestines
- Decreased movement means that food remains in the intestines longer so more water is absorbed and the stool is harder to pass

What can I do about it?

- Increase fluid intake (at least 8 – 10 glasses of water a day)
- Eat more fiber (e.g. grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables)
- Exercise
- Talk with your healthcare provider about changing your iron supplement
- DO NOT give yourself an enema or take over the counter laxatives without talking with your provider

■ Hemorrhoids

An itching or painful mass of swollen veins in the rectum

Why does it happen?

- Constipation

- Changes to circulation
- Pressure from the growing uterus

What can I do about it?

- Prevent constipation (increase fluid and fiber intake)
- Sitz bath
- Use warm then cool compresses to help reduce swelling
- Apply lubricant (from doctor)
- Kegel exercises

■ **Swollen or bleeding gums**

Why does it happen?

- Changes in circulation



What can I do about it?

- Brush and floss frequently
- Be sure to tell your dentist you are pregnant (x-rays and certain medications could be harmful)

■ **Sinus congestion**

Why does it happen?

- Hormonal changes and increased bodily blood volume causes tissues in the nose, larynx, trachea, and bronchi to swell which can cause stuffiness and/or nosebleeds

What can I do about it?

- Increase fluid intake

■ **Skin changes**

Skin darkens (vulva, upper/inner thighs); Linea negra becomes visible (line from belly button to pubic area or chest); Acne; Dark splotches on face (chloasma); Varicose veins; Stretch marks (on stomach, breasts, hips, butt, and thighs)

Why does it happen?

- Hormonal changes
- Exposure to sun
- Mechanical changes (weight gain is too rapid for the skin to accommodate)
- Decreased circulation



What can I do about it?

- Acne: Wash your face as normal. Do not take oral acne medications without talking to your healthcare provider.
- Varicose veins: Elevate legs when sitting. _Change positions frequently when standing. Try exercises for better circulation (see “Edema”)
- Stretch marks: Effectiveness of lotions is unclear, but the moisture may relieve itchiness. They will fade, but will not disappear after birth.

■ Breast changes

Tenderness (can feel like mild tingling or be very painful); Areolae darken and enlarge; Blood vessels become more noticeable; Stretch marks appear; Fluid leaks from nipples; Breasts increase in size

Why does it happen?

- Hormone changes causes development of mammary ducts, alveoli, nipples, and glandular tissue
- Circulation expands in breasts

What can I do about it?

- Wear a supportive bra
- Use breast pads for leaking
- Avoid soap on the areola and nipple to prevent drying of the skin
- If breasts are leaking, allow them to air dry several times a day and after a shower



■ Edema

Swelling of the legs and feet

Why does it happen?

- Growing uterus compresses the blood vessels that bring blood to and from the lower extremities so that fluid is slow to return to the heart from the legs and feet
- Prolonged standing or sitting, poor posture, lack of exercise, constrictive clothing, and hot weather

What can I do about it?

- Drink 8 or more glasses of water each day
- Lie on your side when sleeping or resting
- Exercise moderately
- For improved circulation: When standing and sitting, rotate feet at the ankles or prop feet; try the *pelvic tilt* to relieve pressure on blood vessels
- Rest periodically with legs and hips elevated (place pillows under your legs while lying down)
- Rest in water (large tub, pool or lake) because weight of water pressing on tissues will reduce swelling and promote urination (benefits last for 48 hours after one hour in the pool)
- Wear support stockings



!! Call your healthcare provider if your face and fingers swell, if feet and ankles swell rapidly, or if sudden excessive weight gain.

■ Sciatica

Tingling, numbness, and pain affecting the buttocks, hips, and thighs

Why does it happen?

- Growing uterus and baby put pressure on the sciatic nerve, which branches from the lower back down the buttocks and legs.

What can I do about it?

- Try to decrease pressure on nerve by lying on side or doing the pelvic tilt

■ Leg cramps

Sudden, intense gripping contractions of the calf muscle



Why does it happen?

- Fatigue in calf muscles
- Pressure on nerves and impaired circulation to the legs (from growing baby and uterus)
- Mineral imbalance in the blood (too little calcium or too much phosphorus)

What can I do about it?

- If leg is cramping: Straighten your knee and bend your foot up towards your head. If standing, put weight on cramped leg, keep knee straight and heel on floor, and lean forward. If with partner, have them hold your knee straight with one hand, grip your heel, and use their forearm to press your toes and foot towards your face.
- If leg is cramping: Do not rub the muscle too firmly or point your toes (can worsen the cramp)
- Stretch before bed and in the morning
- Eat fewer soft drinks, salty snacks, and other junk food

■ Ligament pain

Can be sharp, painful periodic spasms in lower abdomen or groin; may be worse on one side

Why does it happen?

- Growth of the uterus causes the ligaments that support it to stretch and spasm



What can I do about it?

- Be careful when reaching, stretching, or changing positions (move slowly)
- Light fingertip massage, warm bath, or heat applied to spasming area may offer temporary relief
- Rest on your hands and knees (baby moves up and out of pelvis and ligaments can relax)

!! Call your healthcare provider if you have abdominal pain, menstrual-like cramps, uterine contractions, or pelvic pressure.

■ Backache

Why does it happen?

- Stretching of ligaments (early pregnancy)
- Changes in posture and relaxation of pelvic ligaments (later pregnancy)

What can I do about it?

- Use good posture and limit stress on back (place one leg on a stool when standing for prolonged periods)
- Daily exercise (swimming, walking, stretching – squatting, pelvic tilt, shoulder circling)
- Take breaks and rest your back throughout the day (sit or lie down).
- Place a small pillow or rolled towel in the lower part of your back when sitting down or driving your car
- Hot or cold compresses or massage may offer relief (heating pad, hot water bottle)
- Warm tub baths



!! Call your healthcare provider if you have low dull backache, menstrual-like-cramps, uterine contractions, or pelvic pressure (like the baby is pushing down).

■ Tingling or numbness in arms or hands

Why does it happen?

- Pressure of excess fluid and blood on the nerves in the arms and wrists.

What can I do about it?

- Use pillows to support you so you can lie on your side without lying on your arm
- Exercises – shoulder circling and upper body stretch OR raise one arm and stretch it upward. Wiggle your fingers for a slow count of 5.

■ Loose, aching joints

Why does it happen?

- Hormones released towards the end of pregnancy soften the cartilage joining the public bone in the front of the pelvis to make more room for the baby to go through – but these hormones affect cartilage in other part of your body too, causing discomfort (back, spine, ankles, and toes)

■ Shortness of Breath

Why does it happen?

- Growing uterus pushes diaphragm upwards, decreasing lung capacity
- Increased oxygen demand because of increased metabolism and fetal oxygen requirements

What can I do about it?

- Avoid sleeping flat on your back
- Prop yourself up at night instead of lying flat
- Slow down when climbing stairs

■ Moodiness

Why does it happen?

- Hormonal changes
- Physical discomforts (nausea, vomiting, fatigue, backache) can cause unhappiness or frustration
- Emotional or social changes resulting from pregnancy (relationships, roles, finances)

What can I do about it?

- Remember that it's normal to have mixed emotions about your pregnancy
- Talk with your partner
- Talk with a friend or family member

!! CALL YOUR PROVIDER IF YOU HAVE THESE WARNING SIGNS !!

- Vaginal bleeding
- Swelling of the face or fingers
- Blurring of vision or spots before eyes
- Severe or continuous headache
- Chest pain
- Abdominal pain
- Persistent vomiting
- Chills or fever
- Pain or burning with urination
- Leaking of fluid from vagina