



Help for Common Complaints and Discomforts During Pregnancy

Pregnancy brings many physical changes, not all particularly pleasant. While causing some women considerable discomfort, most are not signs of a serious problem. We have listed some of the most common complaints, with tips for easing discomfort.

Backache

Backache is a very common feature of pregnancy with about half of all pregnant women experiencing some form of back pain. During pregnancy the body releases hormones which soften the ligaments, particularly those which connect the bones of the pelvis and the lower back. Weight gain during pregnancy causes changes in the normal curve of the spine placing strain on the muscles and ligaments of the back. To avoid or reduce a backache try some of these helpful tips.

- Maintain good posture
 - **Standing** - stand tall with weight evenly on both feet. Keep your 'tummy' and 'seat' muscles tucked in.
 - **Sitting** - sit well back into your chair so that your lower back is fully supported. It may be necessary to place a small rolled towel at the small of your back, i.e. the normal curve of your back. Do not cross your legs. Very soft low chairs should be avoided.
 - **Lying** - keeping your knees bent, whether lying on your back or on your side helps to reduce back strain.
- Use proper bending, lifting and carrying techniques:
 - **Bending** - bend down into a squat when reaching into low cupboards, making beds, gardening etc. Make sure you put one foot in front of the other to counteract the extra weight. *Always bend your knees, keeping your back straight, and don't stoop.*
 - **Lifting** - avoid heavy lifting, whenever possible. To lift correctly, stand close to the object, facing it, feet apart with one foot in front of the other. Squat down keeping your back straight. As you lift, bring the object in as close to you as you can. Never twist your body as you lift.
 - **Carrying** - if you have to carry heavy bags, distribute the weight evenly on each side of you. If carrying babies or small children, change from one hip to the other frequently.
- Wear a good supportive bra

- Avoid wearing high heeled shoes – low heeled shoes or walking shoes are recommended.
- Eat foods high in calcium and magnesium
- Utilize Chiropractic, physical therapy or Acupuncture treatments.
- Occasional use of acetaminophen (Tylenol) up to 1000 mg every 4 hours if needed. Do not take more than 4000 mg each 24 hours.

Constipation

Although it's something not many women like to discuss, constipation is actually one of the most common complaints in pregnancy, affecting around 50% of pregnant women. Constipation is caused by the slowing of gastric action and pressure from the growing baby on the bowels. Iron supplements and decreased exercise can contribute to this problem.

- Drink 8-10 glasses of water per day.
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables
- Increase high fiber foods such as bran muffins, whole grain breads and cereals
- Drink prune juice – ½ to 1 cup each day or eat prunes
- Drink a warm liquid when you get up in the morning.
- Try to have a routine for bowel habits. If you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, be sure to go.
- Exercise often to help to stimulate the bowel and aid digestion.
- You can use bulk laxatives like Metamucil, Citrucel, or Serutan if needed.
- You can also use stool softeners such as Colace or Milk of Magnesia.

Colds and coughs

If you come down with a cold during your pregnancy, be sure to consult your pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter preparations. Many will contain antihistamine, which are not advised in pregnancy.

- Increase fluids and get plenty of rest
- Eat hot food such as soup to relieve your stuffy nose.
- Gently inhaling a salt water steam preparation to reduce congestion–
Be careful to avoid burns.

- Gargle with warm salt water to relieve sore throat (1/2 teaspoon salt to 1 cup water)
- Use good hand washing techniques to avoid spreading germs to others.

Over-the-counter products can be safely used **after the first trimester of pregnancy.**

- Sore throat, try Chloraseptic Spray or throat lozenges
- Headache or fever, try
 - Acetaminophen (Tylenol) up to 1000mg every 4 hours as needed – do not take more than 4000mg in a 24 hour period.
- Cough or sinus congestion, try
 - Guaifenesin (Robitussin) 1-2 teaspoons every 4 hours – do not exceed 8 teaspoons in 24 hours.
- Feeling stuffy from allergies, colds or flu try
 - Saline mist spray or netty pot (You can find a netty pot at your local pharmacy)

Swelling

Retention of extra fluid is a normal part of pregnancy. It helps prepare the pelvic joints for delivery. Normal swelling, which is also called *edema*, is experienced in the hands, face, legs, ankles, and feet. To relieve symptoms of edema, try

- Avoid standing for long periods of time.
- Minimize outdoor time when it is hot
- Rest with your feet elevated
- Wear comfortable shoes, avoiding high heels if possible
- Wear supportive tights or stockings
- Avoid clothes that are tight around your wrists or ankles
- Rest or swim in a pool
- Use cold compresses on swollen areas
- Drink 8-10 glasses of water a day
- Drink 1-2 glasses of cranberry juice each day
- Eat foods that are high in potassium, such as bananas,
- Minimize sodium (salt) intake and avoid adding additional salt to meals
- Avoid caffeine to help decrease swelling

Headache

Headaches may occur at any time during your pregnancy, but they tend to be most common during the first and third trimesters. An increase in headaches during the first trimester is believed to be caused by the surge of hormones along with an increase in the blood volume circulating throughout your body. Headaches during the third trimester tend to be related more to poor posture and tension from carrying extra weight. Headaches may be further aggravated by stress, poor posture or changes in your vision.

- Practice good posture (especially during the third trimester) and spend 15 minutes each day stretching.
- Get plenty of rest and relaxation. Meditation, Yoga and controlled breathing techniques are often beneficial.
- Avoid foods that typically trigger migraines
 - Chocolate
 - Yogurt
 - Aged cheese
 - Caffeine
 - Alcohol
- Eat well-balanced meals
- Rest in a dark room with cool compresses on your forehead or back of your neck.
- Take one or all of the following: Vitamin B2 at 400 mg daily, Magnesium at 400 mg daily, Vitamin D at 2000 IU daily, Coenzyme Q10 at 300 mg daily, or Melatonin at 3 mg daily.
- Use regular strength Tylenol up to 1000mg every 4 hours if needed. Do not take over 4000mg in a 24 hour period.

Heartburn

Heartburn during pregnancy occurs for a number of reasons. Increased levels of hormones in your body while pregnant can soften the ligaments that normally keep the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) tightly closed. If the LES relaxes at inappropriate times, food and stomach acids can reflux back up into your esophagus and throat. Also more pressure is put on your stomach as your body changes and your baby grows.

- Don't eat foods that are known heartburn triggers. These include chocolate, citrus fruits and juices, tomatoes and tomato-based products, mustard, vinegar, mint products, and spicy, highly seasoned, fried, and fatty foods

- Eat several small meals throughout the day instead of large meals and take your time eating.
- Avoid drinks containing caffeine (coffee, tea, cola)
- Wait at least two hours after your last meal before going to bed
- Sleep with your head and shoulders propped up with a wedge pillow or elevate the head of your bed six to eight inches above horizontal.
- Herbal (caffeine free) tea such as chamomile and ginger can sooth heartburn.
- Take an antacid like Maalox or Tums

Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids during pregnancy result from blood vessels in the rectal area or vagina that become overly swollen. They are caused by hormone changes and increased pressure from the baby on the rectum. Fortunately there are many simple and effective strategies for treating hemorrhoids during pregnancy. Here are some easy tips to follow to help relieve the pain and discomfort of hemorrhoids during pregnancy, and tips for preventing hemorrhoids during pregnancy.

- Eat a high fiber diet to decrease constipation
- Take a sitz baths 2 to 3 times per day
- Try using an ice pack or other cold compress on the affected area. This can help reduce swelling and help minimize the pain associated with hemorrhoids.
- Use soft pads and witch hazel to comfort hemorrhoids and clean after bowel movements. Wipe gently to reduce irritation and prevent bleeding.

Insomnia

Many women suffer from intermittent or chronic insomnia during pregnancy. There are many reasons you may have trouble drifting off to dreamland during pregnancy. Some of the more common problems include frequent urination, an unquiet mind, stress, leg cramps or the inability to get into a comfortable position. Fortunately there are simple strategies you can adopt to overcome any of these problems.

- Take a warm tub bath or shower before bed
- Go to the bathroom before bed.
- Take a Yoga class for relief of stress during pregnancy.

- Rest with a pillow between your legs and one under your belly.
- Turn the TV off. Instead listen to calming music, nature sounds or read a book.

Morning Sickness

Feeling nauseated and sick in the early stages of pregnancy is extremely common, affecting about 80 percent of women. Although it is usually referred to as morning sickness, the symptoms can last throughout the day. Symptoms can vary in severity - most sufferers will feel nauseated but may not be sick, whereas some women may find they are unable to keep any foods down.

Morning sickness is caused by the hormones of pregnancy which are helping in the development of the baby and placenta. Although the symptoms are unpleasant, the sickness won't harm the developing fetus. There are a few tried and tested tips which have should alleviate morning sickness:

- Eat small frequent meals - an empty stomach will make you feel nauseated.
- Snack on dry carbohydrate snacks such as dry crackers, rice cakes, toast and plain biscuits.
- Drink plenty of water, tea or juices - avoid caffeine as it can be dehydrating.
- Avoid particular odors that may increase nausea.
- Don't jump out of bed too quickly.
- Take time to rest; fatigue and stress can increase the symptoms of morning sickness.
- If your symptoms persist and you continue to feel sick or you have vomited for more than 12 hours, call your obstetrician.