

Common Discomforts During Pregnancy



Symptoms of discomfort due to pregnancy vary from person to person. Below are some common discomforts. But each parent-to-be may have different symptoms or none at all:

- **Nausea and vomiting.** About half of all pregnant people have nausea and sometimes vomiting in the first trimester. This is also called morning sickness. That's because symptoms are most severe in the morning. Some people may have nausea and vomiting throughout the pregnancy. Morning sickness may be due to the changes in hormone levels during pregnancy.

Morning sickness seems to be made worse by stress, traveling, and certain foods, like spicy or fatty foods. Eating small meals several times a day may help lessen the symptoms. A diet high in protein and complex carbohydrates (like whole-wheat bread, pasta, bananas, and green, leafy vegetables) may also help reduce the severity of the nausea.

If vomiting is severe, causing you to lose fluids and weight, it may be a sign of a condition called hyperemesis gravidarum. Hyperemesis can lead to dehydration and may need a hospital stay for intravenous fluids and nutrition. Call your healthcare provider or midwife if you are having constant or severe nausea and vomiting.

- **Fatigue.** As the body works overtime to provide a nourishing environment for the fetus, it is no wonder a pregnant person often feels tired. In the first trimester, their blood volume and other fluids increase as their body adjusts to the pregnancy. Sometimes anemia is the underlying cause of the fatigue. Anemia is a drop in the ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen. It is often due to low iron levels. A simple blood test done at a prenatal visit will check for anemia.
- **Hemorrhoids.** Hemorrhoids are common in late pregnancy. That's because of the increased pressure on the rectum and perineum, the increased blood volume, and the increased likelihood of becoming constipated as the pregnancy progresses. Preventing constipation and straining may help to prevent hemorrhoids. Always check with your healthcare provider or midwife before using any medicine to treat this condition.
- **Varicose veins.** Varicose veins—swollen, purple veins—are common in the legs and around the vaginal opening during late pregnancy. In most cases, varicose veins are caused by the increased pressure on the legs and the pelvic veins. It is also caused by the increased blood volume.
- **Heartburn and indigestion.** Heartburn and indigestion is caused by pressure on the intestines and stomach (which, in turn, pushes stomach contents back up into the esophagus). It can be prevented or reduced by eating smaller meals throughout the day and by not lying down shortly after eating.
- **Bleeding gums.** Gums may become more spongy as blood flow increases during pregnancy. This causes them to bleed easily. A pregnant person should continue to take care of her teeth and gums and go to the dentist for regular checkups. This symptom usually disappears after pregnancy.
- **Pica.** Pica is a rare craving to eat substances other than food, like dirt, clay, or coal. The craving may be a sign of a nutritional deficiency.
- **Swelling or fluid retention.** Mild swelling is common during pregnancy. But severe swelling that lasts may be a sign of preeclampsia (abnormal condition marked by high blood pressure). Lying on the left side, elevating the legs, and wearing support hose and comfortable shoes may help to relieve the swelling. Be sure to notify your healthcare provider or midwife about sudden swelling, especially in the hands or face, or rapid weight gain.
- **Skin changes.** Because of changes in hormone levels, including hormones that stimulate pigmentation of the skin, brown, blotchy patches may happen on the face, forehead, or cheeks. This is often called the **mask of pregnancy**, or **chloasma**. It often disappears soon after delivery. Using sunscreen when outside can reduce the amount of darkening that happens.

Pigmentation may also increase in the skin surrounding the nipples, called the areola. A dark line also often appears down the middle of the stomach. Freckles may darken, and moles may grow.

- **Stretch marks.** Pinkish stretch marks may appear on the stomach, breasts, thighs, or buttocks. Stretch marks are generally caused by a rapid increase in weight. The marks usually fade after pregnancy.
- **Yeast infections.** Due to hormone changes and increased vaginal discharge, also called leukorrhea, a pregnant person is more prone to yeast infections. Yeast infections cause a thick, whitish discharge from the vagina and itching. Yeast infections are highly treatable. Always talk with your healthcare provider or midwife before taking any medicine for this condition.
- **Congested or bloody nose.** During pregnancy, the lining of the respiratory tract receives more blood, often making it more congested. This congestion can also cause stuffiness in the nose or nosebleeds. Small blood vessels in the nose are also easily damaged due to the increased blood volume, causing nosebleeds.
- **Constipation.** Increased pressure from the pregnancy on the rectum and intestines can interfere with digestion and bowel movements. Hormone changes may also slow down the food being processed by the body. Increasing fluids, exercising regularly, and increasing the fiber in your diet are some of the ways to prevent constipation. Always check with your healthcare provider or midwife before taking any medicine for this condition.
- **Backache.** As a person's weight increases, their balance changes. Their center of gravity is pulled forward, straining the back. Pelvic joints that begin to loosen in preparation for childbirth also contribute to this back strain. Correct posture and correct lifting methods throughout the pregnancy can help reduce the strain on the back.
- **Dizziness.** Dizziness during pregnancy is a common symptom. It may be caused by:
 - Low blood pressure due to the uterus compressing major arteries
 - Low blood sugar
 - Low iron
 - Quickly moving from a sitting position to a standing position
 - Dehydration

To prevent injury from falling during episodes of dizziness, a pregnant person should stand up slowly and hold on to the walls and other stable structures for support and balance.

- **Headaches.** Hormonal changes may be the cause of headaches during pregnancy, especially during the first trimester. Rest, correct nutrition, and adequate fluid intake may help ease headache symptoms. Always talk with your healthcare provider or midwife before taking any medicine for this condition. If you have a severe headache or a headache that does not go away, call your healthcare provider. It may be a sign of preeclampsia.

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