

 Expert View

# The Top 6 Pregnancy Questions I Hear From First-Time Moms

An ob-gyn discusses exercise, coffee, sleep positions, and more.



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First-time moms usually have a long list of questions. They want to do everything they can to protect their pregnancy, and there is a lot to think about.

Each week can come with new symptoms, confusing advice from friends and family, and potential reasons to worry.

As an ob-gyn, here are the questions I most often hear from patients—and the answers that can help them have a healthy pregnancy.

## 1. Are there any foods I should avoid during pregnancy?

This is the number one question I get. There are wonderful resources online that cover healthy eating (visit [Nutrition During Pregnancy](#), for one). What it boils down to is this: You don't want to eat something that might contain [bacteria](#) that could make you sick. Pregnant women are more likely to get very sick from bacteria in food, which can be dangerous for you and your pregnancy.

Risky foods include raw or undercooked meat, fish, and eggs. To avoid problems, cook food thoroughly and wash your hands, knives, and cutting boards after handling raw meat or fish. Avoid homemade mayonnaise and dressings that use raw eggs. Cook scrambled eggs thoroughly.

Avoid raw sprouts, including bean and alfalfa. The moist conditions they're grown in are ideal for bacteria growth. Don't eat unpasteurized (raw) milk and cheeses, such as some feta, queso fresco, and blue cheeses. Deli meats and hot dogs should be thoroughly cooked or microwaved to kill any bacteria.

Cooked seafood is a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, an important nutrient for your pregnancy. But certain fish should be avoided because they have high levels of mercury. Do not eat bigeye tuna, king mackerel, marlin, orange roughy, shark, swordfish, or tilefish. Limit white (albacore) tuna to 6 ounces or less a week. Here's a [list with safer options](#).

Also, fish caught in local rivers or lakes can be unsafe because of chemicals in the water. In my area, for example, there's mercury runoff from old gold mines. It's best to avoid eating fish caught locally unless you can check local safety

information. Otherwise, eat no more than 6 ounces of it and avoid eating other fish that week.

## 2. Can I keep drinking coffee?

There has been research on whether caffeine increases the risk of miscarriage or preterm birth, but the results are unclear. Most experts agree it's safe to drink about one cup of coffee a day—that's 12 ounces (200 milligrams) of caffeine. Pay attention to tea, chocolate, soft drinks, and other caffeine sources when you're calculating how much you're taking in.

## 3. Can I keep exercising? Or can I start a new exercise routine?

If you're already active, we encourage you to continue exercising. We recommend 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week, for 150 minutes total each week. Walking, swimming, and yoga are some of the safest exercises you can do while pregnant. (Read [Exercise During Pregnancy](#) to learn more.) Just talk with your ob-gyn first, as there are some medical conditions that may make exercise riskier.

Some sports should be avoided, primarily if there's a risk of falling or impact to the abdomen. These sports include skiing, off-road cycling, and contact sports like soccer or basketball. Also avoid gymnastics, horseback riding, scuba diving, and skydiving. And it's best to avoid activities where you are lying on your back for more than 10 minutes.

If you haven't been active, talk about your plan with your ob-gyn. Start out slow, with 10 to 15 minutes of exercise, and add 5 minutes a week. Walking may be the easiest thing to do. When you work up to 30 minutes, walking can do wonders for your health. I recommend patients add 30-second intervals of faster walking once they've worked up to it.

A lot of my patients are runners who continue to run when they get pregnant. The main thing is to listen to your body. If it hurts or doesn't feel right, stop. One

patient did half marathons, got pregnant, and continued training. Her growing belly and pelvic pressure made running increasingly uncomfortable, so she cut back on the training. Give yourself permission to cut back or stop when necessary.

## 4. How much kicking should I feel? When should I be concerned?

I bring this up all the time with my patients because I know new moms get worried. Most first-time moms won't feel any movement (kicking) until about 5 months of pregnancy. With a second pregnancy, you typically feel movement earlier because you're more familiar with what it feels like.

Once you start feeling the fetus move, you should feel something every day until about 7 months.

If you start to feel less movement than what you think is normal, you can ask your ob-gyn if they recommend kick counts. This is a test where you time how long it takes for you to feel 10 movements. Do the counts after your biggest meal of the day, because that's typically when there is the most movement.

If you haven't felt 10 kicks within 2 hours, call your ob-gyn. There may not be a problem, but more tests may be needed to be sure.

## 5. Do I really need to sleep on my left side? Can I sleep on my belly?

A lot of women read online that they should sleep on their left side throughout their entire pregnancy, but that's difficult and not necessary. You can sleep on either side, right or left.

You just want to avoid sleeping on your back later in pregnancy. As your belly grows, sleeping on your back puts more pressure on the blood vessels that supply blood to your uterus. If you find yourself sleeping on your back in your second or third trimester, don't panic. Just turn to one side or the other.

You can sleep on your belly, but you'll get to a point where it's just not possible.

## 6. Is it normal to be short of breath?

Yes, it's perfectly normal. You may find you can go up a flight of stairs with very little effort, but you are short of breath. Shortness of breath can start early in pregnancy—it has to do with how pregnancy hormones affect the lungs. But if you have shortness of breath along with chest pain, a cough, or heart palpitations, if you're feeling faint, or if there's a major change in your breathing, then you need to contact your ob-gyn.

Of course, you can call your ob-gyn at any time—whenever you have any questions or concerns. We are always here to help.

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