

Understanding Pregnancy: A Guide for 9th Graders

Along with this reading passage, it is advised to watch the following videos:

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8312a32dcQc>
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usxM_dhEK6M
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikcXKfUvpl8>

Pregnancy is the time when a baby grows and develops inside a mother's uterus. It usually lasts about 40 weeks, starting from the first day of the mother's last menstrual period. These 40 weeks are divided into three stages called trimesters.

First Trimester (Weeks 1-13)

During the first trimester, the baby starts as a tiny cell and grows into a small fetus. Here's what happens:

- **Weeks 1-2:** The mother isn't actually pregnant yet, but her body is preparing for it.
- **Week 2:** An egg is released from the ovary in a process called *ovulation*.
- **Week 3:** Conception occurs when a sperm from the father joins with the egg from the mother, forming a single cell called a *zygote*. This zygote contains all the genetic information that determines things like the baby's sex, hair color, and eye color.
- **Week 4:** The zygote becomes a *blastocyst* and attaches to the lining of the uterus in a process called *implantation*.
- **Weeks 5-10:** This is called the *embryonic period*, where major organs like the brain, spinal cord, and heart start to form. The heart even begins to beat! By the end of this period, the embryo starts to look more human and is now called a *fetus*.

By the end of the first trimester, the baby is about 3 inches long. During this time, the mother may experience changes in her body due to hormones. Some common symptoms include:

- Missed periods
- Nausea (often called "morning sickness")
- Tiredness

- Swollen breasts
- Mood swings

If you have any questions or concerns about how the baby is growing or how you're feeling, it's important to talk to your healthcare provider.

Second Trimester (Weeks 14-27)

In the second trimester, the baby continues to grow rapidly. Here's what happens:

- **Week 14:** The baby is about 3 inches long. The eyelids close, and the sex organs begin to form.
- **Week 16:** The baby grows to about 5 inches long. Fine hair called *lanugo* appears on the head, and the baby starts making sucking motions.
- **Week 20:** The baby can hear and swallow. You might start feeling the baby move, which feels like fluttering in your belly.
- **Week 24:** The lungs are formed but not ready to work outside the womb yet. The heartbeat can be heard with a stethoscope.
- **End of the second trimester:** The baby is about a foot long and has gained more weight.

Many mothers feel better during this trimester compared to the first. Symptoms like nausea and fatigue often improve. However, other changes may occur, such as:

- Stretch marks
- Swelling in the face, fingers, and ankles
- Feeling the baby move

Around the middle of this trimester, an ultrasound exam may be done to check the baby's growth and sometimes determine the baby's sex.

Third Trimester (Weeks 28-40)

The third trimester is the final stage of pregnancy. The baby gets ready for life outside the womb. Here's what happens:

- **Week 28:** The baby can sense light, and the eyelids open and close.
- **Week 32:** The baby gains weight quickly. The bones are soft but fully formed, and the baby moves forcefully.
- **Week 36:** The bones start to harden, but the skull remains soft to help the baby pass through the birth canal. The baby usually turns head-down to prepare for birth.

- **End of the third trimester:** All the organs, including the lungs, are ready to function on their own. The baby drops lower into the pelvis and could be born any day.

As the baby grows larger, the mother may feel uncomfortable. Some common symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath
- Heartburn
- Swollen ankles, fingers, and face
- Tender breasts that may leak a pre-milk called *colostrum*
- Trouble sleeping
- False labor pains called *Braxton Hicks contractions*

When true labor begins, the baby will be born. Most babies are born around 40 weeks, but some may come earlier or later.

Conclusion

Pregnancy is a fascinating journey where a tiny cell grows into a full-term baby over 40 weeks. Each trimester brings new developments for both the baby and the mother. If you ever have questions or concerns, it's always best to talk to a healthcare provider. Remember, every pregnancy is unique, and each mother experiences it differently!