

Common Discomforts During Pregnancy - Pregnancy Planner

During pregnancy your body is going through many changes. These changes are triggered by hormones that prepare your body for pregnancy. These hormones can also cause many physical discomforts. Luckily, there are easy ways to relieve your pains.

Backache - Backache is one of the most common problems women face during pregnancy. The extra weight you are carrying causes a strain on your lower back muscles causing them to become stiff and sore. If you have a backache that refuses to go away or continues to get worse, call your doctor to be sure that this pain isn't caused by another health concern.

Some ways to lessen and relieve back pain:

- When picking up objects below waist level, use your legs instead of your back by bending your knees and keeping your back straight. Avoid heavy strain on your back by letting someone else pick up heavy objects. Also, keep objects within your reach so you don't have to strain yourself to grab them.
- Wear low heeled shoes. High heeled shoes tilt your body and put more strain on your back.
- Stay off your feet! If you have to sit for a long time, sit in a comfortable chair with good support on your back or put a pillow behind the small of your back. If you have to stand for long periods of time rest one foot on a stool while you lean your weight on the other to relieve pressure on your back.
- Sleep on your side with a pillow between your legs to support your back. Also, sleeping on a firm mattress will give your back more support than sleeping on a soft mattress. To firm up a soft mattress just have someone put a piece of plywood between the box spring and the mattress.
- Exercise to keep your back muscles stretched. Strengthen your back muscles by doing exercises and using good posture.
- Use an abdominal support garment to help take the weight of your belly off your back. Some maternity bottoms have built-in, thick elastics that ride below your belly to do the same thing.
- Use a heating pad, warm water bottle, or cold compress on your back to ease pain.

Breast Tenderness - As your body prepares itself for breastfeeding your breasts become larger and heavier. They most likely feel full and tender.

To help relieve breast discomforts:

- Wear a bra that fits well and has good support. A maternity bra, a bra built with extra wide shoulder straps, more coverage in the cups, and an extra row of hooks, is a good choice.
- Wear a supportive sleep bra to give you support while you sleep.

Constipation and Gas - During pregnancy you may get "backed up" from hormonal changes or from vitamin supplements. This can cause painful bloating and gas which may be exaggerated late in the pregnancy when the weight of your uterus begins to push on your rectum.

To reduce bloating and gas:

- Drink plenty of fluids to help flush out your digestive tract.
- Eat high fiber foods, including vegetables, whole grain bread, and bran cereal.
- Exercise to help your digestive system stay on track.

Frequent Urination - Frequent urination during pregnancy is caused by many influences. Your body is working hard to remove waste from your body. As your uterus grows it begins to press against your bladder and cause you to feel like you have to use the bathroom even if your bladder is almost empty. This may lessen in mid-pregnancy, as the uterus no longer rests on the bladder, but may begin again late in the pregnancy when the uterus drops into the pelvis. You may leak urine when you sneeze or cough due to pressure on your bladder. If this happens you can protect yourself by wearing panty shields or sanitary napkins.

To relieve frequent urination:

- Eliminate colas, coffee, and tea from your diet because caffeine makes you urinate more. Don't reduce the amount of fluids you drink, as this will rob you and your baby of vital fluids.

Headache - Headaches during pregnancy can be caused by hormonal changes, stress, increased hunger, fatigue, or even caffeine withdrawal. It is best to speak with your doctor before taking any drugs to relieve the pain.

Here are some drug-free tips to reduce headache pain:

- Rest in a dark quiet room.
- Place a cold face cloth on your forehead.
- Gently massage your temples, or have someone gently massage them for you.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Eat small meals throughout the day to keep your blood sugar constant.

Heartburn and Indigestion - Heartburn, a feeling of burning in the throat and chest, and indigestion, a bloated and gassy feeling that happens when a stomach is slow to digest, may happen during pregnancy. There are many drug-free ways to help relieve symptoms and prevent heartburn and indigestion. Before taking antacids you should speak with your doctor.

To reduce your heartburn:

- Eat smaller meals, more frequently, rather than three large meals a day.
- Relax and eat slowly, chewing your food thoroughly.
- Stay away from foods that bother your stomach, including fried, greasy, and fatty foods. If heartburn is a problem, avoid fizzy drinks, citrus fruit, and fruit drinks.
- Don't lie down after eating and eat a few hours before bedtime. If heartburn is still a problem at night, try propping your head up against a pillow or elevate your head using a couple of books under the legs of your bed by your head.

Hemorrhoids - Hemorrhoids are painful, itchy varicose veins in the rectum. These can be caused by extra blood in your pelvic area and the pressure of your growing uterus on veins in the lower body. They may appear when you are constipated because straining bowel movements trap more blood in your veins. They may disappear only to return again during labor due to the strain of delivery.

Try these tips to help prevent hemorrhoids:

- Ward off constipation by drinking plenty of fluids and eating plenty of fiber.
- Keep your weight gain under control. Extra weight makes hemorrhoids more painful.
- Don't sit for long periods of time. Sitting puts pressure on the veins in your pelvic area.

To reduce the painful swelling of hemorrhoids:

- Soak them in water.
- Apply ice packs.
- Apply witch hazel pads.

Insomnia - Your growing belly may make it hard for you to find a comfortable position while sleeping. Also, the impact emotionally and physically of having a new baby may make it hard for you to fall asleep.

To help you relax and get a good night's sleep:

- Relax your mind and body in a warm bath or shower before bed.
- Learn relaxation exercises and breathing techniques.
- Limit your daytime sleeping.
- Sleep on your side with a pillow under your abdomen and another between your legs.

Leg Cramps - Leg cramps, especially at night, are a common discomfort during pregnancy, although the cause of them is uncertain.

To reduce cramping:

- Stretch your legs before going to bed
- Avoid pointing your toes when stretching or exercising

Lower Abdominal Pains - As your uterus grows, the ligaments that support it are pulled and stretched. This can cause dull or sharp pains on either side of your belly. These pains are most common between weeks 18 and 24. If these pains worsen or don't go away, call your health care provider.

To prevent or relieve pains:

- Avoid moving quickly, especially at the waist.
- Bend toward the pain to help relieve it.
- Rest or change your position.

Nausea and Vomiting - In the beginning of your pregnancy you may feel queasy by the smell of certain foods and have trouble keeping food down. This feeling, known as "morning sickness," can happen at any time during the day or night and may lessen by the middle of your pregnancy. This nausea and vomiting does not harm you or your baby if mild, but if it gets severe, you can't keep any foods or fluids down, and you begin to lose weight, you should see your health care provider.

To help relieve nausea and vomiting:

- Drink plenty of fluids to keep from dehydrating. Sweet, bubbly drinks may help you feel better.
- Eat more often to keep your stomach full.
- If you are nauseated when you wake up, keep crackers next to your bed to nibble on before getting up. Get out of bed slowly, sit and rest before standing up.
- Eat foods that are low-fat and easy to digest.
- Getting fresh air may help. Try taking a short walk outside or sleeping with a window open.

Shortness of Breath - The increase of progesterone early in pregnancy may leave you short of breath. Later in the pregnancy, your uterus grows larger and may press against your diaphragm, making it difficult to breathe. You may feel short of breath but you are still getting adequate oxygen.

To help you breathe easier:

- Give your heart and lungs a break by moving slowly and taking it easy.
- Give your lungs more room to expand by sitting or standing up straight.

Swelling - Due to the increase in water in your body you may experience some swelling, known as edema, in your hands, feet, face and other body parts especially later in the pregnancy and during the summer. If you notice a sudden swelling of any body part you should contact your health care provider.

To relieve swelling:

- Sit with your feet up often.
- Sleep with your legs propped up on a pillow.

Varicose Veins - Varicose veins, blue bulges on your legs or in the lower body during pregnancy are caused by the weight and pressure of your growing uterus. There are no ways to prevent this, but you can reduce the swelling, soreness, and itching.

Following are suggestions to help reduce your risk of developing varicose veins:

- When sitting or standing for a long period of time be sure to move around and change your position once in awhile.
- Sit with your legs straight not crossed.
- Relieve pressure by putting your feet up on something such as a chair, desk, or stool.
- Exercise.
- Wear support hose. Avoid wearing stockings that are tight around your legs.