



**Pregnancy Miracles:**

# **Pregnancy Signs**

**by  
Trying-to-Conceive.com**

At [Trying to Conceive](http://Trying to Conceive), we are passionate about all topics related to the female body, conception, pregnancy, birth, and beyond.

Everyone's road to motherhood is different and we all face our own obstacles. With this blog, we are providing as much information on fertility and pregnancy-related topics as possible. We aim to make the journey easier to navigate through for everyone trying to conceive, including those for whom making a baby didn't turn out to be as simple as they hoped.

A new addition to our site is free and personalized [Ovulation Calendar](#).

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## Pregnancy Signs

Are you pregnant, or trying to conceive a baby? Are you wondering whether you could be expecting, but are not sure? The signs and symptoms of pregnancy are many and varied. Some symptoms are almost universal. Other symptoms are tricky, because they can indicate either a pregnancy, a period, or a medical condition.

No matter what pregnancy symptoms you are experiencing, you'll find them on this list. We'll try our best to help you figure out what is going on with your body. And, as your pregnancy progresses, we will continue to be here for you whenever you are wondering if the sensations you are going through are normal or not. We've grouped pregnancy signs into the three trimesters, but please note that some symptoms can occur in any trimester. If you can't find your symptom in your current trimester of pregnancy, feel free to take a look at the others, too.

### First trimester

The first trimester of pregnancy is, for many women, the period during which they experience the largest number of unpleasant symptoms. Fatigue and morning sickness are common during this time, but they are by no means the only indications of pregnancy. As your body is working hard to create a stable environment for your rapidly developing embryo, you are likely to encounter any, or all of the following [pregnancy signs](#).

### Implantation bleeding or spotting – the first indication of pregnancy



An implantation bleeding is a light bleeding that occurs when a fertilized egg starts to implant into the lining of the uterus, the endometrium. Implantation bleedings typically occur between six and twelve days after ovulation. If you have been keeping a close eye on your menstrual cycles and are aware of the date of your ovulation, an implantation bleeding is very telling, and the first indication that you have conceived during that

cycle. In other words, an implantation bleeding is the very first sign of pregnancy.

About a third of pregnant women experience an implantation bleeding, according to most research. The bleeding itself is generally more like a very light spotting, which can last anywhere up to two days. More often, women will just notice a few drops of blood in their underwear. The color of the spotting can vary, but the blood that is expelled is most old blood and can be dark brown or pinkish (excuse me for offering too much information, but this is caused by mucus mixing with blood), or dark red.

Some women will notice some cramping with an implantation bleeding. The uterine wall is rich in blood and tissue, and it is no wonder that some bleeding and cramping can take place when a fertilized egg implants itself there, in preparation for nine months of pregnancy! Cramping with an implantation bleeding does not indicate a miscarriage. At the same time, it's important to be aware that most miscarriages take place very early on, and before a missed period. These are known as chemical pregnancies.

If you have noticed an implantation bleeding, you can go ahead and take a home pregnancy test immediately. Some tests are very sensitive and if your body has already produced adequate levels of hCG, the test might just be positive. You will have much better chances of getting accurate test results of you test on the date that your period was expected, however.

## Missed or late menstrual period

A menstrual period that is late, and subsequently does not turn up at all, is one of the most obvious and reliable pregnancy signs! If your monthly cycle has been regular, you know when you ovulated and when your period was due, the day of your missed period is one that should definitely prompt you to do an at-home pregnancy test. There are a few caused for late or missed periods, but pregnancy is without a doubt the most common one.

After you conceive, your fertilized egg travels down from the fallopian tubes to the uterus, where it starts to nestle into the lining of the uterine wall. Some women do experience an implantation bleeding – something that is sometimes confused with a menstrual period. Normally, this light spotting occurs around a week before your period is due, so if you have regular cycles and keep track of them, separating an implantation bleeding from a period should not be hard.

Of course, there are some other reasons why your period might be late. Extreme stress is one of them. More physical factors like a new exercise routine, significant weight gain or weight loss, illness and the use of certain medications or illegal drugs are also among the things that can delay or prevent periods. Travel can also do weird things to your cycle. Of course, fertility problems like polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) can also stop your cycle.

If you have been having periods regularly, and you have been trying to conceive a baby, a missed period most probably signifies a pregnancy! Before we congratulate you, we do suggest that you take a pregnancy test though! By the time you have missed your menstruation, your body will have produced enough hCG, or human Chorionic Gonadotropin, for a DIY pregnancy test to be very reliable.

## **An unusually short “period” AKA early pregnancy spotting**

Imagine this scenario – you had been expecting your period for a few days, and perhaps experienced some abdominal cramping. Then, right in line with your expectations, you notice the start of your menstrual flow. Only your bleeding does not increase in volume and stops almost immediately after it started. Was this a period at all? Or could you be pregnant? An unusually short “period” could indeed be an indication of pregnancy. It should really be referred to as early pregnancy spotting, though you won’t know that right away.

If the situation described above applies to you, our first advice for you is to simply take a pregnancy test. Light spotting that is not a period can mean a few things. One possibility is that you are experiencing an implantation bleeding that is a little late. This is especially likely for women who have irregular or longer than usual menstrual cycles. Another possibility is that you are not experiencing an implantation bleeding, but simply first trimester spotting. This is rather frequent, and can have a number of causes.

In irritated cervix is a common cause of early trimester spotting. If you have recently had intercourse, this is a likely culprit. But an ectopic pregnancy, a molar pregnancy, or a miscarriage are also possible reasons for bleeding in early pregnancy. If you are pregnant and spotting, don’t insert a tampon into your vagina, don’t have intercourse, and do contact your healthcare provider at the first opportunity. If your bleeding is extremely light and you are already experiencing other pregnancy symptoms like morning sickness, tender breasts, and extreme fatigue, it could well be a belated implantation bleeding. Please, don’t start panicking before you even know whether you are pregnant.

Have any of you had early pregnancy spotting? Do you know what the cause was, and how did it make you feel? Please feel free to share your stories!

## **Instinctively “knowing” that you are pregnant**

There are many signs that indicate pregnancy. Some are subtle, while some are glaringly obvious. Some are easy to confuse with the sensations many women get every month when they are expecting their

period, or with the symptoms of a common cold or flu. Perhaps no “symptom” of pregnancy is quite as unique as this one. Many newly pregnant women instinctively “know” they are pregnant. This feeling has little to do with any of the other symptoms of early pregnancy, and it isn’t uncommon to just “feel” pregnant even before your period is due.



“Hey, I think I am pregnant” is a feeling that you can encounter even if you are not experiencing any morning sickness, don’t have tender breasts, and have not even missed a period yet. It is something that can strike seemingly out of nowhere, even if you don’t have a clue when your menstruation

should be starting. Are you suddenly overcome by this feeling? It happens to many women, and their instincts are proven right a lot of the time. If this description fits you, take your feelings seriously and get a pregnancy test.

Of course, there is nothing scientific about this pregnancy sign. Women who have been trying to conceive for a while might think that this is a feeling they experience every month, and that it simply means they hope they succeeded this time. But when you are pregnant and simply feel it, it is something that you will be able to distinguish from the feeling of just hoping you might have conceived. Feeling that you are pregnant is, arguably, just as much of an indication that you are expecting as any of the other, more objective signs of pregnancy.

This does not happen to every woman, and of course it is entirely possible to be pregnant and not have that “knowing feeling”. If you do get it, don’t ignore it, though.

## A positive pregnancy test



After a missed or late period, most women who were trying to conceive (and even those who were not!) are quickly prompted to take an at-home pregnancy test to see whether they are in fact expecting a baby. A positive pregnancy test is not exactly one of the pregnancy signs, but it is certainly a very powerful indication that you are pregnant. Perhaps it is the most reliable “sign” of pregnancy. How do pregnancy tests work, and is there any chance they could be wrong?



DIY pregnancy tests require you to pee onto a stick, as most of you are aware of. What does a pregnancy test need your urine for? Well, they work by detecting the hormone human chorionic gonadotrophin, which is produced as soon as a fertilized egg starts implanting itself into the lining of your uterine wall. This hormone, often just called hCG, dominates the female body in those early weeks and can be found in the blood and in the urine. Blood tests for pregnancy are even more accurate than urine tests, and they can be done earlier on – before you have even missed your period. So, how soon after a missed period can you take a pregnancy test? Immediately! At-home pregnancy tests are extremely reliable once a woman has missed her period.

The highest concentration of hCG is found in a woman's urine first thing in the morning. That is why the general recommendation used to be that a pregnancy test should be done at that time. But technology has moved on a bit, and modern pregnancy tests can be used at any time of day. If you test too early, it is possible to get a negative pregnancy test and to still be pregnant. If you are on medication containing hCG, false positives are also possible. Generally speaking, pregnancy tests are very reliable. If you have just tested and your test showed that you were pregnant, it's not too early for us to say, Congratulations!

## A bloated or tender abdomen



Are you newly pregnant, and have you noticed that your abdomen is slightly bloated or tender? Some women find themselves wondering if it is possible that they are already “showing” that early on in pregnancy. The truth is that a bloated abdomen is in no way caused by the size of your baby, but mostly by hormonal changes in your body. Abdominal tenderness and cramping are common because your uterus, a large and strong muscle, is going through a lot of changes. These sensations can be compared to muscle tenderness after you have just started a new work-out regime; your uterus is getting used to being active, where it was previously sedentary.

If you have just found out that you are pregnant, and yet you are already thinking about buying maternity clothes, you are not alone. Almost all women will notice some abdominal bloating during their first trimester. Along with morning sickness, changes in your breasts, and fatigue, a bloated abdomen is one of the most frequent pregnancy signs after a missed period and a positive pregnancy test. What caused bloating during early pregnancy?

Progesterone is a hormone that is essential to pregnancy. It is responsible for many of the feelings you will have during the first trimester of your pregnancy, and a bloated abdomen is one of them. Believe it or not, the bloating itself is more likely to be situated inside your bowels and your stomach than your uterus. Progesterone relaxes muscle tissue throughout your body, and along with bloating, excessive wind or (to put it in plain English) farting is also common in the early stages of pregnancy.

To get relief from bloating, try drinking plenty of fluids like water or herbal teas. Avoiding highly processed foods and eating healthy but small meals can also help.

## **Pregnancy nausea and/or vomiting**

Morning sickness, as it is still commonly called, is without a doubt the most reported pregnancy symptom. For many, pregnancy nausea starts early on in pregnancy. And make no mistake about it – it can, indeed, strike at any time of the day, not just in the morning. Pregnancy sickness can show itself in the form of a slight queasiness, or manifest as vomiting several times a day. Some women sail through their pregnancies without vomiting a single time, but this is quite rare. The good news is that you can undertake steps to prevent morning sickness or at least make it more bearable.

For some expectant mothers, morning sickness is the very first pregnancy symptom they notice. As much as 75 percent of all pregnant women will experience pregnancy nausea and vomiting. Some will feel nauseous mainly during the mornings, and notice that they can handle icky smells better in the afternoons. Many others do not have a set pattern of nausea, and feel nauseous at different times every day. Pregnancy nausea is largely known as a first-trimester ailment. It is true that a majority of women find their nausea clears up after the first twelve weeks, but there are pregnant mothers who stay nauseous throughout their pregnancies too.

Pregnancy nausea is caused by a potent mix of hormones that flood your body when you conceive a baby. Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (hCG) and estrogen are the prime suspects, but other hormones may contribute to pregnancy sickness as well. Furthermore, your sense of smell and taste is heightened when you are expecting, and this increases your chances of throwing up too. Every woman is different, and if you are wondering whether morning sickness is the same for subsequent pregnancies, the answer is that there are no hard and fast rules.

What can you do about pregnancy nausea?

- Eat small meals, frequently.
- Stay hydrated – drink plenty of water or herbal teas

- Don't try and hold it in if you feel the need to vomit – sometimes, you feel much better after throwing up
- Eat a dry cracker or something else that is really bland, before you get up
- Try to avoid smells that trigger your nausea

## Aversion to certain foods, drinks, or smells



Aversion to certain, specific foods, drinks, or smells something that comes with the job when you are pregnant. In a sense, this is simply an extension of pregnancy nausea and vomiting. But these aversions do not always make you feel sick, or cause you to vomit. Sometimes, newly pregnant women simply find that things that they used to love no longer appeal to them.

One of aversions that is most frequently encountered by expectant mothers is an aversion to coffee. Even if you used to drink so many cups of coffee that you might as well have bought shares in Starbucks before, it is entirely possible that the thought of drinking coffee just no longer appeals to you. Strong perfume smells, or the smell of fish, are also common offenders. Do you normally get Chinese take-out every Saturday evening, but now prefer to nibble on some carrots instead? Totally normal!

Unsurprisingly, theories that such aversions were “designed by nature” to protect your growing fetus from harmful substances go round quite a lot. At Trying To Conceive, we think that such theories sound logical and plausible. It must be noted that there is no scientific evidence (yet) that pregnant women have aversions to foods, drinks, or other items because they could be dangerous for your baby. Just as there are women who can't drink a single cup of coffee during pregnancy, there are also those who crave caffeine. And then there are those expectant moms who simply can't resist items that are clearly not good to eat, like paper, soap, and similar non-food items (look at our article about ice cravings during pregnancy for a common example).

If you have noticed sudden aversions to things that you liked, or that were at least bearable before, it might be a great reason to take a pregnancy test. These aversions often turn up at the same time as morning sickness.

## Extreme fatigue, and low energy

Extreme fatigue and low energy is almost inescapable during the first trimester of pregnancy. If you are hardly able to get through the day and would like going to bed at 4 pm best of all, you are certainly not the only one. Hormones in your body, progesterone most notably, are hard at work and are preparing your body for nine more months of pregnancy. Progesterone can make you fatigued and sleepy all by itself, but there are other contributing factors as well. Let's take a look at the different things can contribute to low energy in early pregnancy, as well as some of the things that you can do about it.



In the first place, you've got to remember that your body is growing a whole new human being from scratch, along with an internal organ of your own – the placenta. It is no wonder that this takes some of the wind out of your sails! Many of the other symptoms that are common during the first trimester of pregnancy contribute to tiredness as well. If you are suffering from pregnancy nausea and vomiting, this can exhaust you physically. Being unable to keep meals down also means having less fuel to spend during the day. Frequent urination in the nighttime can shorten your time spent sleeping,

and contribute to fatigue. And leg cramps or heartburn can also keep you up at night. Iron deficiency anemia is also more common in early pregnancy, and that can make you extremely tired. Get a blood test so you can exclude anemia or treat it.

Sometimes, simply giving into the fatigue and getting as much rest as you can is the best approach. Fresh air, and plenty of fruits and vegetables can also do you a lot of good. The best remedy for pregnancy fatigue is time, however. Most women find that they have tons of energy again once they enter the second trimester of pregnancy.

## Sore and tender breasts

Sore and tender breasts are a common occurrence when a woman is about to get her period. Just before the onset of menstruation, the female body experiences a surge in the hormones estrogen, progesterone and prolactin. This cocktail is responsible for breasts that feel heavier, are a bit painful to the touch, and are slightly bigger than usual. Sore and tender breasts are also a very common early pregnancy symptom. But because this probably happens to you every month, it can be difficult to recognize it as a sign of pregnancy.



The cause of breast changes in early pregnancy is exactly the same as the cause of breast changes during your monthly cycle – hormones. It is easy to assume that your tender breasts are a signal that your menstruation is about to start. Unfortunately, there is no formula to distinguish tender breasts before a period from tender breasts that are caused by early pregnancy. The only difference when you are pregnant is that your breasts will continue to feel sore, bigger, and more tender, and your period will not turn up.

Breast changes are often one of the earliest symptoms of pregnancy. Most women will notice a change in their breasts before their period was due, and will notice that their breasts will continue to go through changes during their whole pregnancies. As your due date draws nearer, and your body prepares itself for childbirth and breastfeeding, you are likely to start leaking colostrum, the first milk your baby gets, from your breasts. Colostrum production can start as early as 22 weeks gestation. Many women will see that their breasts increase in size as their pregnancy goes on. The size and color of your nipples may also change. Do not be alarmed by this – it is totally normal. Breasts may also feel slightly lumpy during pregnancy and while breastfeeding, but tender breasts alone are not enough to make you conclude you are pregnant. If you are looking for a full list of symptoms, take a look at our pregnancy signs page.

## An increase in the frequency of urination

Do you find yourself in the restroom every couple of minutes, wondering why you need to pee yet again? Do you have to interrupt important meetings at work to urinate? Are you having trouble making

it to your destination without peeing yourself when you are driving? welcome to the beautiful, exciting, and sometimes somewhat urgent world of pregnancy. An increase in the frequency of urination is a pregnancy sign that is almost universal at the beginning of the first trimester, and one that lasts right up till birth. Read on to find out why.



Pregnant women have a higher blood volume than their non-pregnant counterparts. The uterus, the growing placenta, and the fetus itself all need blood. The increased blood volume supports the life growing inside you. That makes a lot of sense, doesn't it? The downside for you, the expectant mother, is that this increased volume of blood also means that additional fluids go through your kidneys, onto your bladder, and need to be eliminated.

Many women find that they have an especially urgent need to pee during the night time. Later in pregnancy, this is due to the baby putting pressure on your bladder. But early on during the first trimester, frequent night time urination is caused by the fact that fluids which your body retained in your extremities, your hands and feet, return to your kidneys and your bladder as you relax and lie down.

Avoiding stimulating fluids such as coffee and tea can help alleviate this problem. Drinking more water than usual might actually help against nightly bathroom tips. If you find that this is contrary to common sense, you are not the only one. But water helps your system run smoothly, and fights edema, a normal symptom of pregnancy.

## **An altered libido – wanting more sex, or none at all**

An altered libido is really nothing more than a change in the level of your sexual desires. Of course, everyone has a fluctuating libido, and both men and women go through periods of wanting more sex, less sex, or no sex at all. Sometimes these changes are triggered by events in a person's personal life (stress, or feeling relaxed), and sometimes they are caused by hormones. Women who are newly pregnant often find themselves going through libido changes.

### *Decreased sex drive*

A decreased desire for sex is more common during the first trimester of pregnancy than an increased libido. This has a lot to do with hormones like progesterone, which are making you physically tired and

not up to much in general – especially sex! You are probably also experiencing some pregnancy nausea and vomiting during the first few months of pregnancy, making intercourse with your partner even less of an attractive thought. Later in pregnancy, insecurity about your growing and changing body may lead to a decreased sex drive. If you do feel like having sex, but are simply too tired, perhaps this is a great



time to ask your partner to give you a nice, relaxing massage or pamper you in other ways.

#### *Increased sex drive*

Some women report that they have increased sexual desire during pregnancy, and that their sex life has never been as great as when they were expecting a baby. This is simply the other side of the hormonal coin – the same hormones have a different effect on different women. Pregnancy also means that there is a higher volume of blood in your body, especially around your reproductive organs. For some women, that caused an increased desire for sex, and more sensational orgasms too.

Al altered libido alone isn't really much of an indication that you are pregnant, but it can help you piece the puzzle together if you are having other symptoms too.

## **Unusual vaginal discharge**

Vaginal discharge, or cervical mucus, is something that every woman experiences as soon as she starts menstruating. If you have been charting to conceive and tracking your cervical mucus, you probably know that vaginal discharge varies in amount, color, and structure depending on where in your cycle you currently are. In pregnancy, cervical mucus also changes. If you notice any unusual vaginal discharge, pregnancy could certainly be to blame.

Most pregnant women notice an increase in cervical mucus. While that might be annoying, you can console yourself with the fact that you will at least not be getting any periods while you are expecting! Pregnant women may notice this increase in vaginal discharge because the cervix softens and is working hard to prevent any infections from forming in the uterus. In other words, the vaginal discharge you notice is actually working to protect your growing baby from bacteria and viruses.

While more discharge is completely normal, do keep an eye open. If your “lower regions” feel itchy, your discharge smells bad, or there is any blood in it at all, please contact your healthcare provider to make

sure you do not have a yeast infection or some other problem. Most of the time, this is nothing serious but it does need treatment.

Did you know that vaginal discharge can also alert you that you are about to go into labor? During pregnancy, the cervix is kept closed by a large “coin” of mucus and blood, appropriately called the mucus plug. When the cervix dilates and effaces enough, and labor is about to start, a pregnant woman will lose this mucus plug. The mucus plug can come out all at once, or bit by bit. If you notice something like that around your due date, you can expect your baby to turn up sometime soon!

## **Mood swings or feeling very emotional**

Early pregnancy comes with a set of pretty universal and unmistakable symptoms, that are easy to interpret. These include morning sickness, extreme fatigue, and of course a missed period. But some other common early pregnancy signs are not so simple to interpret, yet they are definitely caused by hormonal changes and pregnancy. Many women notice mood swings, and feel extremely emotional in the early weeks of pregnancy.

If you suddenly cry while you are watching the news, or even because a co-worker helped you out at work, or because the bus was late – perhaps it is time to wonder if your period is late, too! This is actually how I discovered my first pregnancy. Someone made a random nice comment, really nothing special, and I found myself crying for some reason. A few days later, after I had taken a pregnancy test, I realized why I simply could not stop crying!

But, instead of soft and easily touched by nice gestures, you might also be overly irritated and even angry all the time. Hormonal changes in early pregnancy can do unpredictable things to a woman. There are women who are emotional during their whole pregnancies, but mood swings are primarily a third trimester pregnancy symptom.

What is the answer to these mood swings? If your friends, relatives and colleagues know that you are pregnant, you can ask them to go easy on you and ignore any angry or emotional outbursts. Try and accept that emotional changes can be an integral part of pregnancy, and that it will get better as time goes on! While mood swings are not as easy to define as pregnancy vomiting, it is just another in a long list of pregnancy signs that is completely normal. Go with the flow!



## First trimester weight loss

Pregnancy is a time during which you should focus on eating healthily, without worrying about how many calories you are consuming. Everyone knows that pregnant women gain weight, don't they? But what if you are in your first trimester of pregnancy and instead of gaining weight as you expected to, you are losing it? Don't panic just yet, as first trimester weight loss is not unusual. Let's take a look at why some pregnant women lose weight during their first three months of pregnancy.

The female body is hard at work in those early weeks of pregnancy. When you are growing a whole new person from scratch, it is no wonder that you are burning more calories than usual. Couple this with the fact that the majority of pregnant women experience some morning sickness and vomiting during the first trimester, and find it hard to keep their food down, and it is easy to understand why weight loss is not unusual and nothing to worry about during the first trimester.



Instead of watching the scales, watch your plate and make sure that you are getting plenty of foods from every major food group. Especially fruit and vegetables are important during this time. If you are vomiting a lot, or have low appetite, trying to eat small meals but more often. Drinking plenty of water and sleeping when you experience pregnancy fatigue can actually help your overall health, and reduce your nausea. In turn, this approach can also put a stop to your weight loss.

By the time your second trimester starts, you should be gaining some weight, and noticing the beginning of a baby bump. Some women "show" their pregnancies much earlier than others, and some women obviously gain more weight than others over the course of their pregnancies. But while it is not essential to a certain specific amount of weight, your uterus should visibly increase in size over nine months.

## Skin changes – impurities on the facial skin

Every woman knows that impurities on the facial skin can appear just before a period sometimes. Some women even notice zits before they start ovulating. Skin changes, and especially impurities, are also an early pregnancy symptom. Whether your skin is normally clear and perfect, or you get zits from time to time anyway, persistent impurities can give you that extra clue that it might be time to take a pregnancy test.



If you suddenly find yourself looking like you are back in high school, and are wondering whether you should be investing in some good skin purifying products, it could be a pregnancy test that you need instead. Of course, hormonal changes are the culprit. A surge in progesterone can cause break outs on your face, but also on other parts of your body, especially your shoulders and back. Besides pimples, pregnancy can also cause your skin to become itchy and irritated, and oily or shiney. Around half of all pregnant women will notice a so-called “pregnancy mask” – darker facial skin that

looks like you have been in tanning too long, sun-glasses included.

*Is there anything you can do about skin problems during pregnancy?*

Many women find that facial impurities go away as soon as the first trimester is over. Not everybody gets that famous pregnancy glow that cosmetic companies would like to bottle and sell, but as your body gets used to the fact that you are pregnant, your skin should at least calm down a bit. Drinking plenty of fluids can help to cure pregnancy acne, and you should be making sure that you are eating a healthy and balanced diet full of fresh fruits and vegetables in any case, while you are expecting.

Using aggressive skin products is not advisable for pregnant women. Some of these are not safe for the fetus, and they are unlikely to be helpful anyway. Washing your skin with a gentle, natural soap and limiting your make-up could have some effect. The good news is that your skin will certainly return to normal once you give birth. And, because you are unlikely to start menstruating again right away, you could have the most beautiful skin in those early months of your baby’s life.

## **Linea negra – a dark vertical line on your tummy**



Have you noticed a dark vertical line stretching from your belly button to your pubic bone? Or perhaps even from your belly button up to your breasts? That is the famous linea negra, dark line, which shows up on as many as three quarters of all pregnant women. What is the linea negra, and why do so many women get this pregnancy symptom?

The linea negra, which literally means “dark line” is something that most pregnant women get. It happens to women with all skin colors, but it’s likely to be darker in those with darker skin. This “war stripe” is caused by the same thing that causes other skin changes in expectant mothers – you can blame your hormones for this one too! But unlike impurities of the facial skin, or pregnancy acne, this skin change can actually be very beautiful.

This dark line can show up at any time during pregnancy – or not at all. Don’t worry if you do not get a dark line on your belly. Although most women notice some skin darkening around their belly, it is not a cause for concerns if you do not notice any yourself.

Most women who get a linea negra notice it sometime during the second trimester, but others notice it practically as soon as they take their pregnancy test, while some do not get it until they are about to give birth. Funnily enough, there are some ladies who will first see that their belly button starts getting darker, and a line will develop only after that. A linea negra is not permanent. It will start fading in the months after your baby’s birth, and eventually it will just disappear.

## Loss of appetite in pregnancy

For some people, “eating for two” is a synonym for pregnancy. Yet, many pregnant women actually experience loss of appetite. What should you do when you don’t feel like eating during pregnancy? What causes a loss of appetite during pregnancy and is this something you should be worried about? When in pregnancy can you expect loss of appetite?

Morning sickness is common during the first trimester. As many as three quarters of all pregnant women feel nauseous, and most of those also vomit occasionally. While you are struggling with pregnancy nausea and/or vomiting, and while have a very sensitive sense of smell, it is logical that loss of appetite will follow. As long as you get enough calories and stay hydrated, you will be just fine.

The second trimester presents yet another opportunity for loss of appetite. Many women don’t feel like eating much during their second trimester, because the digestive system slows down during this time. This is caused by the growing uterus putting pressure on the stomach and other digestive organs. Lots of women also get constipated at this time.

In addition, the second trimester is when cravings for certain foods generally start. You might have fruit cravings or want fresh salads all the time. Or you might just have cravings for junk food, or even non-food items. Again, it is quite normal if you don’t feel like eating a lot, or if only certain foods appeal to you. But make sure that you get the right nutritionists and that you eat more than only those foods that you crave.

What can you do if you don't feel like eating? One solution is to try and eat smaller meals, but a bit more often. Another thing you can do if you have a juicer, is making sure you get your five pieces of fruit and veg by drinking them. Green, leafy vegetables like spinach or rocket make great juice ingredients. Other things I have included in juices are carrots, tomatoes, cucumber, ginger, and celery. Green juices are a great solution for women who don't feel like eating much, but really need all the goodness that fresh produce offers.

## Second trimester

The second trimester is, for many women, the period of their pregnancy during which they feel at their best. Your growing baby bump enables you to show off your pregnancy (and people are no longer wondering if you just put on some weight!), the nasty [pregnancy signs](#) of the first trimester are largely in the past, and you might have tons of energy. What other things are you likely to encounter during the second trimester of your pregnancy?

### A growing uterus

As you leave the first trimester behind, hopefully along with its less pleasant symptoms – morning sickness, aversions to certain foods and smells, and extreme fatigue – your body will start growing, and you will develop that beautiful baby bump that is so characteristic of pregnancy. All expectant mothers are different, and you may well be worrying if your belly is too big, or too small. All kinds of people, including total strangers, might be making comments about your body shape and speculating about your baby's gender, or whether you are having twins. At least, as your uterus grows, everyone knows that you are pregnant, and not just fat!



Before you get pregnant, most of the abdominal cavity is filled by the intestines. When you get pregnant, the uterus starts taking up more space and the position of your internal organs shifts to accommodate your baby. While you may have a bloated or tender abdomen during the first trimester of pregnancy, your uterus is still tiny and tucked away in the pelvis at that stage. Most

women will start “showing” at some point in the second trimester.

Every woman “carries” differently. But whatever you look like on the outside, your baby will have reached the level of your belly button by the 20th week of your pregnancy. As your uterus grows, it will move up somewhat. Your bowels and bladder are likely to have less pressure concentrated onto them as the second trimester progresses, and you may feel more comfortable than before. If you palpate your abdomen, you can probably feel something protruding forward.

Your baby grows most rapidly during this time, and the way you look will change from week to week. Don’t forget to take pictures so that you can keep track of the wonderful changes your body and baby are going through!

## Feeling fetal movement

Feeling your baby kick is certainly one of the most beautiful, exciting aspects of any pregnancy! From those small flutters that are barely noticeable, to the powerful and sometimes painful kicks that people can even see from the outside, feeling fetal movement makes you realize just how special it is to be expecting a baby. When can most pregnant women feel their baby kick, and is there any difference for subsequent pregnancies?

Ultrasound technology has revealed that a fetus starts moving its arms and legs in utero as early as six or seven weeks. But at that early point in pregnancy, your baby is far too small, and the movements far too weak, for you to be able to detect any kicks or punches. The majority of first time mothers will start feeling fetal movement anywhere between 16 and 22 weeks along in their pregnancies. Those first few flutters are very light, and you might well find yourself wondering if that thunder-like sensation in your abdomen is your baby moving, or just your bowels playing up.



As your pregnancy progresses, your baby’s movements will be difficult to confuse with anything else. Some women are able to distinguish kicks from movements made with the hands, and can feel their babies flip about in their growing uterus. The time you can start to feel fetal movement does depend on the location of your placenta – those with anterior (frontal) placentae have to wait a while (or a lot!) longer to feel those kicks.

How often should you feel your baby move? Like everyone else, even babies in utero have rest periods and periods of activity. Besides that, some little ones seem to be

hyperactive and make their mothers feel like they are doing acrobatics in there, while other babies are more easy-going and gentle. Getting to know your baby's pattern of movements, and getting in touch with your doctor or midwife if something changes, or if your baby suddenly stops kicking, can be of crucial importance.

## **Pregnancy weight gain**

Pregnancy is associated with weight gain, and it is normal for expectant mothers to worry about their weight. Are you gaining enough weight? Are you putting on weight faster than you should? What portion of your weight gain can be attributed to your baby and the placenta, and what portion is additional fat? Is your pre-pregnancy weight relevant when it comes to pregnancy weight gain? Let's take a closer look at all of these questions.

Every pregnant woman gains weight at a different rate. While it is important to make sure that you are getting adequate nutrition and that your diet is healthy and balanced (includes foods from all major food groups), obsessing over your exact weight gain or lack thereof is not necessary. What you should probably do if you want a clearer insight into your eating habits, is track the number of calories you are getting. Pregnant women are recommended to consume around 300 calories more than they would when not expecting a baby.

Expectant mothers with a healthy pre-pregnancy weight and body mass index (BMI) should gain somewhere between 25 and 35 pounds. It is normally more for women who started their pregnancies with a BMI that is on the low side, and slightly less for those who started out with excess weight. Pregnancy is not a time to start dieting, but it should not have to be a time to eat without limits, either. Remember that weight gain is not usually a nice steady graph, but something that goes in spurts. That's totally normal, and just the way nature works.

Newborn babies tend to weigh between 6 lbs and 10 lbs. A placenta averages 1.5 lbs, while the baby's amniotic fluid amounts to around 2 lbs. So, after you give birth you can expect to lose anywhere up to 14 lbs immediately.

## **An increase in appetite – “eating for two”**

For some people, the phrase “eating for two” is pretty much a synonym for pregnancy. Eating for two, as in eating double the amount, has no scientific basis at all. But it is not at all uncommon for pregnant

women to notice an increase in appetite. For some, this happens early on in the first trimester, while others don't feel up to eating much in early pregnancy due to morning sickness, but do have a larger appetite in the second and third trimesters. Should you give in, and eat as much as you like, or is there any reason to limit calories while you are expecting a baby?

Women who have a healthy Body Mass Index (BMI) when they conceive do not need to pay special attention to the amount of calories they are consuming. It is said that pregnant women need an average of 300 more calories a day than their non-pregnant sisters. That's not a lot – a couple of slices of toast with butter in the morning does the trick!

For the majority of women, eating as much as you want while you are pregnant is a great approach. What is more important than the amounts of food you consume is what you are actually eating. Make sure that you are getting foods from all major food groups and try snacking on fruits or vegetables when you get cravings. Pregnancy should not be an excuse to feast on fast food whenever you feel like it, but you should not be denying yourself healthy foods just because you are worried about excessive weight gain, either. An increase of appetite signals that your baby is growing, and your body needs more fuel to keep up with all the work.

## Cravings for certain foods

The majority of expectant mothers will have some food cravings during pregnancy. Sweet and sugary foods constitute the most popular cravings, but other women will find that they simply can't stay away from certain hearty snacks. In what stage of pregnancy do cravings usually show up? What are the most common cravings? And most important of all, why are you having food cravings while you are expecting a baby?



Scientists have been working to find the cause of food cravings in pregnancy for decades, but unfortunately, no evidence has been found as to what might be behind these cravings yet. Still, there are many theories surrounding this universally recognized pregnancy phenomenon. Perhaps the most popular theory is that cravings could be caused by hidden nutritional deficiencies. In other words, your body is in need of something, and your brain somehow acknowledges that and you experience a craving. Sometimes, cravings are

simply a reflection of the fact that you need a few more calories while you have luggage on board!

Whatever might be the reason you are having cravings, it is clear that they are an integral part of expecting for a lot of moms to be. As long as you are not limiting yourself to the foods you are craving and are eating a healthy diet, there is no evidence that there is any harm in giving in to your cravings.

Sugar cravings during pregnancy are the most common, especially chocolate and ice cream. Tons of women also find themselves thinking about a nice steak or other red meat, and fruit cravings are common too. If you are experiencing ice cravings, or cravings for other things that are strictly speaking non-food items, you should exercise more caution. Craving things that are not edible is known as pica, and can be dangerous.

## Montgomery's Tubercles

We have discussed the changes a woman's breasts when she gets pregnant before – sore and tender breasts are a common first trimester pregnancy symptom. But one slightly unusual symptom, that might worry you if you are not aware what it is, is Montgomery's Tubercles. Montgomery's Tubercles are raised spots on the areola, the darker skin surrounding the nipple. They are caused by glands in the breast tissue called Montgomery – hence the name Montgomery's Tubercles. These glands naturally swell up during pregnancy, and therefore Montgomery's Tubercles belong on the list of pregnancy symptoms.

The raised bumps can vary in size and number per woman, and even per breast. Not every pregnant woman develops Montgomery's Tubercles, and even women who are not expecting a baby can get them. Because the underlying glands produce oil to help keep the skin hydrated, you may notice that an oily substance is expelled from any Montgomery's Tubercles that you develop during your nine months.

Montgomery's Tubercles may look weird to you if you get them. It is no surprise that you may worry about them, when you have no idea what they are. Funnily enough, most online resources that talk about these bumps mention not only that they are completely normal – which they are – but also that Montgomery's Tubercles are not additional nipples. This comment appears on numerous websites and I had to share it with you because it made me laugh. Of course, one cannot develop additional nipples, and what's more, Montgomery's Tubercles look nothing like nipples! They can rather be compared to zits or pimples, and usually appear when your breasts start growing in preparation for breastfeeding.

If you are worried about something connected to your breasts, asking your healthcare provider about the changes you are experiencing is in order. But we do want to stress that breast changes, including Montgomery's Tubercles, are a normal and healthy part of pregnancy.



## Enlarged breasts – your body is preparing for breastfeeding

As you leave behind your first trimester of pregnancy, you are likely to feel a lot better. The early, hormonal symptoms of pregnancy are largely gone, and instead you will start experiencing pregnancy signs that make it clear that your body is preparing for your baby's impending arrival. Not only will you notice a growing uterus, and start feeling fetal movement, your breasts will also undergo numerous changes in an effort to prepare them for breastfeeding your baby once he or she is born. In this process, your breasts can grow several cup sizes. Enlarged breasts are a sign that your body's preparations are going smoothly.



Colostrum, the first milk that your body will produce to nourish your baby in his or her first couple of days after birth, actually appears at some point during pregnancy. Many women will see that their breasts start leaking small amounts of colostrum in the second or third trimester of pregnancy. Your breasts might continue to grow throughout your pregnancy. This is very common, although it does not happen to every pregnant woman – and we have to note that you will be able to breastfeed your baby even if your breasts stay the same size.

If you find your breasts grow enough to warrant buying new bras, you may want to look into buying some good nursing bras. These are not strictly necessary, but many women find that they do make breastfeeding easier and give you quicker access to your breasts while you are nursing. Take into account that your breasts may still continue to grow when you go bra shopping. Some ladies go from an A Cup to a D Cup, or even bigger! Sometimes, growing breasts mean itchy and irritated skin. If you are experiencing this, try massaging some anti-stretch mark cream onto your breasts to help the skin cope with all the changes.

## Blood pressure changes – hypertension or hypotension

Blood pressure is something that will be monitored carefully in pregnancy, and measured at every prenatal appointment. Of course, you can check your own blood pressure at home or at a pharmacy as well. Does blood pressure in pregnancy differ from blood pressure when you are not expecting a baby?

And what if you have pregnancy hypertension (high blood pressure) or hypotension (low blood pressure)?

During the early months of pregnancy, the hormone progesterone dominates the body. One of the things progesterone does is relaxing the veins. Additionally, pregnant women have more blood that needs to be pumped around the body. Because of this, many women experience hypotension or low blood pressure during the first and second trimesters of their pregnancies. If you are feeling weak, dizzy, and have a tingling feeling in your extremities, this could be due to low blood pressure. Though sometimes unpleasant, low blood pressure is mostly harmless, especially when you are pregnant and the cause is clear.

High blood pressure can also develop during pregnancy. If your healthcare provider finds out you have hypertension before you reach 20 weeks, it will most likely be assumed that you already had a high blood pressure before you got pregnant. After 20 weeks, high blood pressure will be classified as pregnancy hypertension. Like with lower blood pressure, this is not normally dangerous. But if you do have high blood pressure while you are expecting, your doctor or midwife might want to keep a closer eye on you.

It is suddenly spiking blood pressure that is a worry, because it can indicate pre-eclampsia, a dangerous pregnancy condition that can quickly turn into eclampsia which can, amongst other things, lead to seizures. For more information about this, see pre-eclampsia cause found.

## **Skin changes – that pregnancy “glow”**

Is your facial skin brighter, and almost perfect, all of a sudden? You have got to be pregnant! If you have ever heard that pregnant women have a glowing, wonderful skin, and wondered if that is true, now is the time to find out. Many moms to be do really get that beautiful pregnancy “glow”! What causes the famous pregnancy glow, when does it normally turn up, and is there anything you can do to reproduce it when you are not expecting?

As we have discussed before when describing the other pregnancy signs (please do check out our full list!), pregnancy causes an increase in the volume of blood that is pumped through your body. This is one of the factors that contributes to your beautiful skin, because more blood is circulated around your facial area too. Hormones are, of course, the other factor. Oil production working over hours on your facial skin probably sounds like a nightmare and a recipe for pimples, but this is in fact exactly what is happening to you. As a result, you will look great!

The pregnancy glow is most likely to show up during your second trimester, and it might well stay with you until after you give birth. In my experience, most women in their first trimester of pregnancy have

break outs and impurities on the facial skin, and when that clears up you will be positively glowing! This is a definite pregnancy symptom, and though cosmetic companies might love to bottle that glow and sell it for lots of money, it is ultimately caused by internal things that can never be recreated when you are not pregnant.

If your facial skin is too oily for your taste, you can try cleaning it with a gentle, oil-free cleanser. Of course, there is always facial powder to help you as well.

## Water retention – edema

Edema, the build up of excess fluids, is a common and normal pregnancy symptom. This condition, also popularly called water retention, usually manifests itself in the arms and legs. The majority of pregnant women get some water retention somewhere along the line while they are expecting a baby. The most common for of edema has got to be swollen ankles. Is edema ever a serious health concern? And what can you do to combat this pregnancy sign?



Edema is especially common in expectant mothers who are not very physically active. If you have a long commute to work, or if you have an office job, you are bound to notice some degree of swollen ankles and feet in pregnancy. Changing positions as often as you can, stretching your legs while you are at your desk, and taking frequent breaks to go for short walks, can do wonders. Water retention is caused by the additional blood volume every woman has while they are “with child” pooling

around the extremities. Pregnancy and your growing uterus put the veins and internal organs under more pressure than usual, which means the flow of blood from your legs back to your heart takes a bit longer than it normally would.

Besides physical activity, drinking plenty of water is the best way to fight water retention. Dehydration can cause a wide range of problems in pregnancy – edema is just the tip of the iceberg. Comfortable shoes without heels and loose fitting clothes can also help you keep edema at bay. Swollen ankles during pregnancy are slightly irritating but nothing to worry about. But if you notice a swollen face and swollen hands, and they will not settle down, it is time to contact your doctor. These could be signs of preeclampsia, and need to be taken seriously.

## Swollen ankles as a pregnancy symptom

We have already discussed edema, water retention, in general. The most common form of edema during pregnancy is without a doubt swollen ankles. Swollen ankles are often mentioned as a normal symptom of pregnancy, and they are. But that does not mean that they are not a bit unpleasant, or that you can't do anything to combat them. What caused swollen ankles? Why are they more common than other forms of edema? And of course, what can you do to get some relief from swollen ankles?

Swollen ankles are a logical consequence of the fact that you have more blood pumping around your body while you are expecting a baby, and that your kidneys have more fluids to process. In addition, veins are put under more pressure as your uterus grows and your internal organs get squished in the abdominal cave. Legs, and ankles in particular, are a common target for water retention because the blood takes more time to return to your heart from your extremities and fluids can build up in these areas.

Swollen ankles can be annoying, but should be painless. If you are experiencing swollen ankles, try going for regular short walks, generally staying active and drinking plenty of water. You should not wait until you are thirsty to drink. Lying down for a while if your ankles get really swollen is another possible remedy for this nasty but typical pregnancy condition.

Edema can start in the second trimester (which is why we listed this symptom in the second trimester on our pregnancy signs page), but gets more common as your pregnancy progresses into the third trimester. Swollen ankles should not normally be a cause for worry, and there is no need to make an extra prenatal appointment if you have "fallen victim" to water retention. You should mention it at your regular appointment though.

## Separation of abdominal muscles – making space for your growing baby

As soon as your belly starts getting bigger and you develop that famous "baby bump", your abdominal muscles will start moving out of the way to make space for your rapidly growing uterus. This separation of the abdominal muscles is called diastasis recti. It is very common during pregnancy, and most women will notice their abdominal muscles move out the way to make space for their baby at some point during the second or third trimester of pregnancy.

A separation in the abdominal muscles is seen as a medical problem that needs to be corrected in normal circumstances, but it is something that is frequently encountered in pregnant women, as well as those who are in the postpartum period. Diastasis recti is more likely to turn up in women who have given birth multiple times already, due to more frequent episodes of stretching. If your separated

abdominal muscles do not move closer together again and then start closing within about six weeks after you have given birth to your baby, you may need physiotherapy to correct it.

You can feel whether you have separated abdominal muscles by tensing up the muscles, and trying to put some fingers in the middle. Women with diastasis recti during the postpartum period will be clearly able to feel two definite “sides” to their abdominal muscles, with a cavity in the middle.

Keep in mind that doing ab crunches with diastasis recti is not advisable. Abdominal exercises might have the opposite effect to your muscles going back to normal – which is presumably what you wanted – and instead keep the muscles permanently separated. Talk to your healthcare provider before resuming work outs after you have had a baby. The six week postpartum checkup is a good time to ask questions.

## Braxton Hicks contractions

Braxton Hicks contractions are random, patternless uterine contractions that start early on in pregnancy. They are referred to as contractions because they technically are, but they have nothing to do with labor contractions. Braxton Hicks contractions are generally painless and normally hardly even noticeable. Your uterus will feel firm during a Braxton Hicks contraction, but they normally pass with a simple change of position.

Braxton Hicks contractions are, as you probably guessed, named after the doctor who first observed and documented them – the English doctor John Braxton Hicks. Although not every pregnant woman notices Braxton Hicks contractions, everyone has random uterine contractions. Braxton Hicks contractions are commonly noticeable from the later part of the second trimester of pregnancy up to the time you give birth to your baby, though they start at around the sixth week of pregnancy.



Describing contractions accurately is very difficult, but when you get Braxton Hicks contractions you will know for sure. They don't feel anything like labor contractions, and are characterized by a sudden tightening of your growing uterus. Have you notice how your belly will go rock hard all of a sudden, only to go back to normal a few seconds later? Those are Braxton Hicks contractions. And excuse me for giving too much information, but Braxton Hicks contractions are extremely common after a woman has experienced an orgasm.

Later in pregnancy, these uterine contractions become more frequent and sometimes even painful. It can be hard to distinguish Braxton Hicks contractions from the real thing around your due date, but there is one clear difference: labor contractions get closer together and follow a definite pattern. They also get longer as the birth draws near, and get more painful. Braxton Hicks contractions do not get closer together, and unlike labor contractions, they tend to subside when you change position.

## More frequent headaches

Everybody gets headaches sometimes, and there are many underlying causes. Expectant mothers often find that they have more frequent headaches than ever before. Pregnancy headaches can strike at any stage during pregnancy, but most women find they are worse during one trimester than the others. What is behind pregnancy headaches? Are they normal? And what are the cures?



Like most other things in pregnancy, headaches are predictably partially caused by hormonal changes. But there are many other factors that contribute to more frequent headaches when you are expecting – including insomnia, fatigue, and dehydration. Low blood sugar levels are another common reason for headaches, as well as higher stress levels which some pregnant women experience. During the final weeks of pregnancy, headaches can also be triggered by pressure on your internal organs and

blood vessels, and in some cases headaches can be a symptom of preeclampsia. If you are suffering from terrible headaches, make sure to tell your doctor or midwife about it, so that they can keep an eye on other preeclampsia symptoms and signs too.

When you are struggling with frequent pregnancy headaches, try and get more rest, and also make sure that you get enough fresh air. Drinking plenty of water is important for many reasons during pregnancy, and avoiding headaches can be added to the list. In fact, dehydration is the first cause you should examine when you get another headache. Some doctors advise using over the counter pain killers for pregnancy headaches, but there is evidence to suggest that over the counter painkillers may not be safe during pregnancy. Before you turn to paracetamol, try the aforementioned, natural steps to cure pregnancy headaches.

## **Itchy nipples during the second and third trimesters**

The human body is quite the interesting, well-oiled machine! When you are pregnant, your body already begins preparing for what will happen after you give birth to your baby. Breast changes start becoming noticeable very early on during pregnancy, and can be one of the very first pregnancy symptoms you are aware of. Your breasts might start growing, and they can feel heavier and tender. Later on in pregnancy, you might start leaking colostrum – the first milk mothers produce for their babies. If you have itchy nipples as well as leaking milk, you can wonder if everything is OK. But, itchy nipples are not an uncommon symptom during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

Itchy nipples can be, more than anything else, really irritating. After all, you are not really going to scratch them, even if you want to! But there is no reason to be concerned about itchy nipples. The itch is a natural result of all the other breast changes, and most of all the fact that your skin is stretching.

As a mother of two, I remember the itchy nipples during pregnancy very well. There is nothing more embarrassing than wanting to scream and grab onto your breasts to quell the itch (Well, perhaps there is – weak bladder control and pregnancy incontinence). And coming up with solutions can be tricky. But, if your nipples are itching and you can't bear it anymore, there are things you can do. Try slapping them, or putting an icepack on them. For some pregnant women, gently massaging the whole breast can also offer relief from itchy nipples.

Itchy nipples are most likely to happen during the second and third trimesters of your pregnancy, and they will be gone by the time you give birth.

## **Lower back pain in the second and third trimesters**

Your growing uterus and baby certainly start putting a strain on your body from the second trimester onwards, and lower back pain is a common manifestation of this. Your ever-expanding belly literally changes the center of gravity in your body, and your baby bump causes your muscles to work harder to perform simple, day-to-day tasks like walking and bending. Your joints also have more pressure to endure as your body grows.

On top of the extra stress on your muscles and joints, hormonal changes also play a major part in lower back pain in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. As your body prepares for childbirth, the ligaments and joints surrounding the pelvic opening loosen up. It is just as well that this happens, as it enables your baby to move through the birth canal! But the negative side effect is that you can increase lower back pain.

You are more likely to get back pain if you are carrying twins, if you already have a history of back pain, or if you were obese or physically not very active before pregnancy. But anyone can get back pain. As many as 75 percent of all expecting mothers get backaches – so if you have it too, you are definitely not on your own. That probably doesn't help you any, though. Is there anything you can do to get relief from lower back pain?

Exercising might be counter intuitive when you are hurting, but gentle work out regimes like swimming or prenatal yoga can do your back the world of good. Making sure that your posture is good, and you don't bend in ways that put even more stress on your back, can also help. A massage is always wonderful, and regular visits to a massage therapist can really help you get through those final weeks of pregnancy!

## **Frequent episodes of heartburn – acid reflux**

Heartburn is a nasty burning feeling in the upper chest – everyone experiences it sometimes and it can have many different causes. When you are pregnant, heartburn – also known as acid reflux – occurs due to hormonal changes in your body, as well as the fact that your stomach is under more pressure than usual. The majority of pregnant women experience occasional episodes of heartburn, and they have a nasty tendency to strike in the middle of the night and keep you up. So, what is the key to curing heartburn?

Heartburn can be exacerbated by bad dietary choices, stimulants like coffee (which you want to be careful with in pregnancy for other reasons too. See drinking coffee while you are pregnant – is it OK?), tight-fitting clothes and a sedentary lifestyle. Being active and eating healthily has many benefits, and can help prevent heartburn too – but when you are pregnant, it is pretty hard to avoid heartburn altogether. Frequent episodes of heartburn are more likely to become a problem once your baby is relatively big and puts pressure on your stomach – sometimes in the second trimester. Over the counter medications are available for heartburn, but there is some evidence that antacids can have a negative effect on your fetus if taken in large quantities.

For that reason, I prefer natural remedies for acid reflux. Fortunately, there are many of these around. My absolute favorite is baking soda. All you have to do is dissolve a teaspoon or so into a glass of water, and drink the mixture. For me, it cures heartburn every time. Some other natural remedies for heartburn include papaya or pineapple enzymes, large quantities of almonds, and straight apple cider vinegar. Another remedy that I have really found effective is... Coca cola! Indeed, this should not be listed under “natural cures”, as it is far from natural. But it tastes great and give you heartburn relief, too!



## Third trimester

As the birth of your baby draws near, some of the [pregnancy signs](#) of the first trimester might come back. It's normal to be tired and nauseous in the final weeks of pregnancy. You may have trouble sleeping, and feel excited about meeting your baby soon. Physical discomfort is not unusual during the third trimester, and this is just one of the contributing factors that make you want to be "done" with pregnancy already, and welcome your baby!

### Heavy fetal movement and hiccups



Once you enter the third and final trimester of pregnancy, and your baby is quickly increasing in size, fetal movement is hard to miss! Do you remember those first, butterfly-like flutters in your abdomen, and wondering whether that could be your baby kicking? Now, your baby does not just flutter; he or she kicks, boxes, twists around and even has hiccups in there! Heavy fetal movement and hiccups are the privilege of the last trimester.

Your baby is fast approaching his or her birthday! You basically have a fully-functional human being in your tummy, and in the third trimester, your baby's "job" is just to grow and put on as much weight as possible. He or she is no longer tucked in to your abdominal cavity. When it comes to fetal movement, that means that you can often see your baby move around in your uterus from the outside! This is great for the father to be, and for friends and relatives, because they can feel and see your baby move too.

Sometimes, your baby's kicks and punches are so vigorous that you feel sore, and are bruised. And prepare for the possibility that you will feel your baby have hiccups too, because fetal hiccups are pretty common. During this time, you might get to know your baby's personality and their waking and sleeping patterns a bit better. Their level of activity in the womb may well reflect what your baby will be like once they are born. The third trimester is a great opportunity to bond with your baby.

When your baby is moving, try interacting by lightly prodding your tummy, or moving your hands up and down. Many baby's reciprocate, and prod back!

## Pregnancy hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are an unfortunate occurrence that can cause a lot of discomfort, and even pain. When you have hemorrhoids, the veins around your anus become swollen, and appear as bulging areas around the rectum. These nasty swellings, which are a form of varicose veins, are not unusual in pregnant women. It is possible to get hemorrhoids for the very first time when you are expecting, but if you have previous experience with them, they are likely to strike in pregnancy too.

Why do hemorrhoids have a nasty way of occurring during pregnancy? Well, varicose veins are more common when you are gestating a baby, and unfortunately, the rectal area does not get a special exception. In addition, many pregnant women experience constipation. Hard stools can cause hemorrhoids too, because of all the straining that is likely to be involved with them.

But, while they are certainly unpleasant, hemorrhoids are not normally a real worry. If you have small hemorrhoids, you do not usually need any medical treatment. Using a stool softener can help them disappear, and you can get some relief by applying an icepack to the affected area or using a herbal sitz bath. Some women get rectal bleeding as a result of hemorrhoids. In that case, it is important to clean the area very well each time you use the toilet – but gently, because vigorous wiping with rough toilet paper can make them worse.

If you are suffering from persistent and large hemorrhoids, you might want to contact your doctor about them. You might find that you will get the same advice we have just given, but in bad cases, there are local anesthetic creams available that can help you gain pain relief and also make the swelling go down a bit.

## Shortness of breath in pregnancy

Have you noticed that breathing has become a bit more difficult since you started “showing” and your tummy is growing? Shortness of breath is quite a frequent pregnancy symptom. Pregnant women need more oxygen, and this need is met by an increased amount of breaths per minute, as well as more air taken in with each breath. In addition to this fact, your growing baby and uterus will be pressing down on all your internal organs. This, too, can contribute to shortness of breath in pregnancy.

When you first notice it, you might not feel you are short of breath or experiencing breathing difficulties as much as you simply notice your breathing more. This feeling can start as early as the first trimester of your pregnancy, though most women report that they start noticing changes in breathing patterns at some point during the second trimester. Later on, breathing will become can become more than just

something you are more aware of, and start becoming a real problem – for many pregnant women, especially at night.

Slight shortness of breath during pregnancy is completely normal. Paying attention to your posture, going for regular walks, and exercises (prenatal yoga is a good one) can help with it. Once your baby drops into your pelvis during the end of the third trimester, your internal organs including your lungs will have more space again. When that happens, you will probably no longer be short of breath.

If you have preexisting lung problems or asthma, this can get worse during pregnancy. In that case, it is best to discuss your condition with your doctor as early on in pregnancy as you can, so that you can look at possible solutions.

## **Gestational Diabetes – diabetes in pregnancy**

Gestational diabetes is a type of diabetes that develops in pregnancy. Diabetes involves dangerously high blood sugar levels, caused by the inability of insulin to process sugar. Gestational diabetes can occur in pregnant women with no family history of diabetes, but there are some risk factors. As many as two to ten percent develop diabetes, making it a relatively frequent pregnancy condition. That has earned gestational diabetes its own place on our pregnancy signs page!

Of course, the first thing you want to know about gestational diabetes is what its symptoms are. Unfortunately, there are usually no symptoms. Sometimes gestational diabetes is associated with rapid maternal or fetal weight gain, but not always. Fortunately, most women are screened for gestational diabetes as part of their routine prenatal appointments (what to expect from a glucose test) between 24 and 28 weeks. Women who have gestational diabetes don't have a problem with insulin production, but instead hormonal changes make the body less reactive to insulin.

Women who have obesity, those who already went through gestational diabetes in previous pregnancies, those whose urine tests showed sugar spillage, and those with a family history of Diabetes Type 2, are at higher risk of developing gestational diabetes and might be screened more carefully.

You might also ask your doctor for additional screening earlier in your pregnancy if you do have some of the typical diabetes symptoms, though this is rare for gestational diabetes. The symptoms that should alarm you are continuous and extreme thirst, that does not go away with drinking water, and frequent peeing as a result of your water intake. Rapid weight gain can also be a sign.

Gestational diabetes can sometimes be managed through a good diet, though other women require medication. Normally, it goes away after the woman gives birth. But those who had gestational diabetes are at a slightly higher risk of getting Diabetes Type 2 later in life.

## Abdominal “popping” sounds

Pregnancy comes with many different symptoms. Many of them will already be familiar to you, because everyone talks about them. You probably went into your pregnancy expecting morning sickness, back pain, or high blood pressure. And you also knew you would be experiencing amazing things like feeling your baby move, or your belly button suddenly protruding outwards. But it is entirely unlikely that you thought you would hear weird abdominal “popping” sounds with your every move. So, what is that all about?

Not every woman gets popping sounds when she is expecting a baby, let us be clear about that. The ones that do might get them around their hips, back, or – most commonly – somewhere in the abdomen. Some pregnant ladies report hearing these clicking noises, or even feeling a slight pop, when they walk around. Others get them in the night time. And there are also pregnant mothers who get the clicking noises when it is their baby who is active. If you are one of them, should you be worried?

Clicking sounds can be caused by many different things. During pregnancy your joints will loosen up due to hormonal changes (see hip pain and aching joints). These looser joints can certainly be responsible for clicking sounds or sensations. But they can also be caused by certain movements your baby makes, or by a somewhat confused digestive system. If these feelings are accompanied by pain, it is time to ask your doctor about them.

Otherwise, they are just a pregnancy curiosity. Did you know that these abdominal “popping” sounds are rarely addressed by books about pregnancy, and that even doctors or midwives may have no idea what is behind them? As long as clicks and pops do not make you feel uncomfortable, you can just put them on your list of gestational weirdities, and forget about them after you give birth!

## Pelvic Girdle Pain

When you are pregnant, changes in your posture, looser joints and muscles, and a shift in the center of gravity can lead to a range of painful symptoms that are experienced by many women expecting a baby. One of these symptoms is lower back pain, which we already discussed, and another is Pelvic Girdle



Pain, abbreviated as PGP. We will take a closer look at PGP, its symptoms, and how to get relief.

The factors described above contribute to Pelvic Girdle pain. Some of these causes are directly related to the size of your baby and uterus – you are unlikely to suffer from postural problems early on in pregnancy, because your baby is still too

small, and your center of gravity doesn't change until you start showing. Hormonal changes do occur early on in pregnancy, and some women get Pelvic Girdle Pain as early as the first trimester. On the whole, it is more of a late-pregnancy ailment, however.

The symptoms are pain in your pelvis (from the vaginal area to the lower abdomen), hips, and even thighs. Some women hear a clicking noise around their pelvic bones when they move around. The pain of PGP comes in waves, originating from the pelvis outwards, and moving around tends to be uncomfortable. PGP ranges from mild and occasional to severe. In extreme cases, it can make pregnant women unable to stand up and walk. If you have any of the symptoms that could point to PGP, do discuss them with your doctor.

For most women, Pelvic Girdle Pain resolves itself after birth. You might discuss exercises for pain relief with your doctor, as well as postural improvements. It is possible that your healthcare provider will advise you to rest as much as possible, and limit physical activity. Sometimes, you need pain killers to help you deal with chronic pain.

## **Nesting instinct – the natural urge to prepare your house for the new baby**

Have you got the almost uncontrollable urge to clean, reorganize every cupboard in your house, or wash your baby's clothes and iron them? This is what is referred to as the nesting instinct, and it is a very common third trimester pregnancy symptom. Pregnancy signs do not always have to be tangible physical symptoms, and this "mental symptom" is one that prepares you for life as the mother of a new baby. Many animals experience the nesting instinct when they are about to give birth, and humans are no different.

The nesting instinct manifests itself in different ways for every pregnant woman, but the majority will notice this at some point during their third trimester. Some of the more frequent urges that expectant mothers report include repainting the walls in their homes, cleaning and reorganizing their kitchens, and cooking large amounts of meals for freezing. It is also common to want to run your baby's outfits and bedding through the washing machine and to want to iron them. Some women get the urge to wash their pre-pregnancy clothes and put them back in the wardrobe too. Then, there are mothers who feel they need to go and get cards for their baby's birth announcements.

It is important to differentiate the preparations you make for your baby because you rationally know they are needed from the deep, immediate urge to organize and clean. We all experience the first, because baby's do need preparations. The second category is less rational – when you want to scrub every corner of your bathroom over and over again, you bet that it is a bad case of the nesting instinct! Unless you want to do things that are physically irresponsible (like standing on high ladders to scrub the ceiling), go with your instincts and clean away. Know that your baby will be with you sometime soon!

## **Hip pain and aching joints**

Hip pain, and aching joints around the pelvis and hips, are problems that many pregnant women encounter, especially during the latter half of pregnancy. Research suggests that hormonal changes, which loosen your joints and prepare your body for childbirth, are responsible for hip pain and aching joints. This might help you have an easier labor, but it certainly is not nice during your pregnancy. Is there anything you can do about these ailments?

Unfortunately, not too much information is available about pregnancy hip pain, despite the fact that many expectant mothers report having problems with their hips. Pelvic pain and lower back pain are discussed much more frequently in pregnancy literature (see Pelvic Girdle Pain, for instance). These are caused by the same hormones that are also responsible for painful hips, but medical experts do not pay much attention to this pregnancy condition. Yet, aching hips can make your life more difficult and cause trouble in moving around and sleeping.

If you are experiencing hip pain in the night and it is causing you trouble sleeping, positioning a few pillows under your hips might help. Full body maternity pillows to help you sleep in pregnancy can also provide a lot of relief from pain. Good posture during the day is difficult to maintain when you are expecting, but making sure you don't stress your body too much is always good. Try to get as much rest as you can, and prevent putting too much strain on your hips. Massage, seeing a chiropractor, or doing prenatal yoga are other alternatives that might help you cope with hip pain when you are expecting a baby. Fortunately, hip pain during pregnancy is a temporary condition that is almost certain to resolve itself after you deliver your baby.

## **Weak bladder control or pregnancy incontinence**

An increase in the frequency of urination, weak bladder control, or pregnancy incontinence are hardly topics you want to discuss with anybody. This is not one of the points that will ever come up in small talk

about your pregnancy, and how you are feeling when you are expecting. Yet, having trouble controlling your bladder is not at all unusual in pregnancy, especially in the third trimester. It is absolutely normal to need to run to the bathroom very often, or to have some “leaks” when you laugh. Weak bladder control is nothing to worry about, but it is very annoying and embarrassing.



Leaking a little urine during pregnancy is a form of stress incontinence. Before you ask – no, that has nothing to do with your state of mind! Stress incontinence refers to the additional stress that your bladder is under, because your growing baby is pushing on it, and is forcing your internal organs to move into a position they are not normally in. Additionally, your bladder can't hold as much urine as it can when you are not pregnant, again because your baby is in the way. Weak bladder control can also be caused by a urinary tract infection (UTI). If you suspect you have a UTI, it is important to call your doctor, because UTI's in pregnancy can lead to pre-term labor in some cases.

So, when does this happen? Most women start noticing that they have less control over their bladder sometimes during the third trimester of pregnancy. You can counteract a weaker bladder by going to the bathroom more often, staying hydrated well, and using panty liners in case you do lose a little now and then. You will regain complete bladder control soon after birth, when your muscles go back to normal.

## **Belly button “popping” outwards**

As your baby is growing inside your body, be prepared for a lot of unexpected physical changes! One of the most funny pregnancy symptoms is your belly button “popping” outwards. This can happen during the second or the third trimester. Your growing uterus not only squishes your vital organs and forces your body to perform internal acrobatics; changes can be seen on the outside as well. Many women notice that their belly button suddenly starts protruding!

Not every woman gets a protruding belly button in pregnancy, and for those that do have this symptom, it is unpredictable exactly when it will happen. If your naval does pop outwards, it is caused by the size and position of your baby. If he or she is putting constant pressure on your belly button, it is no wonder that something will have to give in the end; and it is not your baby! A “pregnancy outie” is nothing to worry about. If you are concerned that your belly button will stay that way forever, put those fears

aside! Just like any pregnancy hip pain and aching joints will disappear, and pregnancy incontinence will be a thing of the past once you have a sweet little baby, your belly button will also make its way back inward!

If you have a naval piercing, now is the time to take it out. Your stretching skin can be damaged by body jewelry if you leave it in place. For women without pierced belly buttons, there is no need to undertake any particular action. A pregnancy outie might be a sign that your skin is also being put under pressure, so keeping it hydrated with creams might just help a bit in fighting stretch marks.

## **Colostrum leaking from the breasts**

When you see that your breasts have started leaking colostrum, the first you will ever produce for your baby, it might come as a bit of a shock. If this happens to you, you are probably in your third trimester. Leaking a bit of milk is a sign that your body and your breasts are working just the way they should be, but it is not unusual not to notice any colostrum until after your baby is born, either.

During pregnancy, your breasts will undergo many changes and they might feel sore, get bigger in size, and your nipples may change color. Leaking a bit of milk is the last stage of these changes, and it shows you that your body is ready to breastfeed when you give birth.

Typically, if you leak breast milk, it is no more than a few drops at the time. It might be yellowish in color, like butter milk, and it's going to be very thick. Some women start leaking colostrum as early as the first trimester of pregnancy, but leaking breasts are mostly a third trimester symptom. If you are leaking substantial amounts of milk, you can try using breast pads to keep your clothes from getting wet.

Colostrum is your first milk, and it contains everything your baby needs in the first few days of life. It contains a myriad of antibodies that serve to protect your baby from infections and diseases, and colostrum also has more proteins and fat than the breastmilk you will start producing some time after birth. Colostrum is the perfect way to deliver many nutrients to your baby in a small concentration, given the fact that the digestive system is still imperfect and the stomach tiny.

## **Prodromal labor – irregular contractions**

As your estimated due date approaches, your body will start preparing for childbirth. There are many ways in which your body can manifest signs of impending labor and birth, and prodromal labor or irregular contractions are an obvious one. When you are dealing with prolonged prodromal labor, it is



easy to get frustrated and even to wonder if you will ever give birth. Frequent and heavy Braxton Hicks contractions might make you feel like you are going through discomfort for no reason at all. But, even prodromal labor can help open up your cervix.



For some women, prodromal labor can feel very much like active labor, including heavy and painful contractions. Those contractions do not come in any clear pattern, and can go on for several weeks before active labor finally commences. Yet, these irregular contractions are not totally pointless. Sometimes, they can help open the cervix. There are expectant mothers out there who walk around with a cervix that is four centimeters dilated for days, or even weeks. One thing that you may want

to keep in mind is that women who experience prolonged irregular contractions could have labors that are extremely short once they do go into active labor.

Your baby will soon be born, so this is the ideal time for some last minute preparations. Make sure you have everything you need for your newborn, and get in some extra groceries for the period immediately after your baby is born – frozen meals are a really great thing to have on hand. Have you got your hospital bag for labor and birth packed? If you are all set, all that is left is to look out for signs that your baby will really be born soon. These include losing your mucus plug, having regular contractions that get closer together, and your bag of waters breaking.

## **Baby “dropping” into the pelvis**

Sometime late in the third trimester, your baby will suddenly drop into your pelvis. This indicates that labor and birth are drawing near, and it is also called “engaging in the pelvis”, or lightening. When your baby drops, you will certainly be aware of this because your tummy will change shape, you will feel more comfortable, and might find it easier to breath again. Indeed, when your baby engages, your internal organs are given more space, and that is why you will feel lighter!

You will feel significantly different than before when your baby drops. You might be able to feel your baby’s head low down in your pelvis, and perhaps you will have yet another increase in the frequent of urination – because the baby will be putting much more stress on your bladder. Walking might also get more difficult. But other organs will get more space, including your lungs. Breathing might be easier after your baby drops, and heartburn might go away too.

When in pregnancy a baby will drop into the pelvis depends on many factors. Perhaps the most important one is whether you are a first time mom, or have already been pregnant and given birth before. Primiparas tend to notice their babies drop earlier on, while mothers with subsequent pregnancies might not experience their baby engage until they are already in labor. This is not a fool-proof rule, but rather a tendency. Every woman and every pregnancy is unique, and babies engage at different times in pregnancy.

Lightening does not say anything about the length of your labor, or about when your baby will be born. Unlike, for example, losing your mucus plug or getting regular contractions, a baby that engages in your pelvis is not a sign of impending labor. But it is a signal that your body is moving in that direction, and that everything is going according to plan.

## Losing your mucus plug

The mucus plug is a thick seal of mucus that keeps your cervix shut and prevents bacteria from entering the uterus during pregnancy. This mucus plug plays a role in protecting your baby during your nine months of pregnancy – think about it as a cork on a good bottle of wine. And, as with wine, the plug coming out is a sign that action will soon follow. As the cervix dilates and thins, you will pass the mucus plug. Most of the time, passing the mucus plug is a signal that labor will start within the next 24 hours.

### *What does the mucus plug look like?*

Discussing the look of the mucus plug might be a bit gross for some, but how will you know what to look out for if you have no idea what the mucus plug looks like? If you have ever practiced fertility charting, and monitored your cervical mucus, you will have some idea what the mucus plug will look like. It is a thick coin of mucus. Often, that mucus is white and stringy, mixed with blood. Other women liken the mucus plug they lose at the end of pregnancy more to the snot that can be noticed if you have a bad cold. Some expectant mothers pass the plug all at once. In that case, it will be hard to avoid. For others though, the mucus plug will be lost in parts over the course of several hours.

### *When will you lose it?*

Passing the mucus plug is without a doubt a sign that labor is about to start very soon. Therefore, it should ideally happen when you have carried your pregnancy to term. The third trimester, from 38 weeks to 42 weeks, is the time you should be on the look out for the mucus plug. If you notice anything that looks like the mucus plug before term, you might go into pre-term labor, so contact your doctor right away.

## Insomnia due to uterine size

At the very end of pregnancy, your baby and uterus will have got so big that it will be difficult to move around. You will hardly be able to tie your shoelaces, or wipe yourself after going to the bathroom, or keep your balance when you walk down the stairs. But those are not the only things; you might have had trouble sleeping from the second trimester onwards, but at the very end of pregnancy your uterine size alone will be enough to keep you awake. When your tummy is that big, it can be Mission Impossible to find a comfortable position to sleep in.

In the last few weeks of pregnancy, your ever growing uterus will become the main obstacle when it comes to getting some good quality shut-eye. It is not at all unusual to actually experience a decrease in the number of pregnancy symptoms you have as you approach your estimated due date (EDD). Perhaps, frequent episodes of heartburn are no longer troubling you, and you generally feel good. But still, the majority of women find that getting a full night's sleep is not an easy task in this stage of pregnancy. Perhaps it is a preparation for after your baby is born?

Your baby, meanwhile, is fully formed but is still gaining weight – as much as 25 grams every day! During these final weeks before the birth of your baby, his or her head will descend into your pelvis, something that will give more space to your internal organs and will change the shape of your tummy. Once that happens, you might feel a bit more comfortable, but it is still likely that you will wake up frequently during the night. Once your baby “drops”, your bladder will once again be put under a lot of stress and you will need to pee more often.

## Development of stretch marks



breasts and buttocks.

Stretch marks are not the most welcome pregnancy symptom for anyone. These red, purple, or pink lines in your skin are sure to be seen as the enemy by any expectant mother. And those stretch marks engaging in guerrilla warfare means that hardly any spot of your body remains safe. They are caused by, as the name already suggest, a rapid stretching of the skin, and most commonly affect the abdomen, where the majority of stretching is taking place. But stretch marks can also appear on your back, thighs,

Many women try to fight stretch marks during pregnancy by applying skin creams that are supposed to keep this condition, also known as striae, in check. Despite that, most women still get some stretch marks. It depends on the way your body changes during pregnancy, and on genetics, when or if it will happen. Many women already notice some stretch marks in the second trimester, but for others they only appear in the third trimester, at the very end of pregnancy. Then there are women who (like me!) get them after they have given birth.

While there is not much you can do about those nasty lines once they have made their unwelcome appearance, it does have to be said that they mostly fade with time. When a stretch mark first shows up, it will be dark, very noticeable, and very different to the surrounding areas of your skin. But after a while, they fade into silvery or white lines that are hardly noticeable.

While I would never have volunteered for stretch marks, they are now a part of my body. Frankly, you can hardly see them at all – apart from three thin lines just under my belly button. They are the marks of a mother, and they are just there. You can't do anything about them, so you might as well accept them.