

Common Discomforts of Pregnancy

Pregnancy is amazing but doesn't always feel good. Your body changes a lot throughout pregnancy and with some of those changes you may experience new or uncomfortable sensations such as:

Back Pain

1. Loose Ligaments: The hormones of pregnancy can loosen ligaments in preparation for the delivery of your baby. Unfortunately, this can lead to a feeling of joint instability.
 - Stretching and staying active can help keep you limber.
 - Wearing sensible shoes and clothes can be helpful.
2. Center of Gravity: As your belly grows, your posture will change putting an increased amount of stress and weight on your back. Your breasts enlarging can have a similar effect on your upper back.
 - Keeping good posture and using ergonomic movements is very important (squatting instead of bending).
 - Using a pregnancy support belt can be helpful.
3. Stress: Everyone has their trigger point that hurts when under stress. This often is exaggerated in pregnancy.
 - Warm baths and hot packs, as well as massage, can be very helpful.
 - Take time to put your feet up!
 - Sleep on your side with a pillow between your legs to help support your pelvis.
4. Contact your doctor immediately for severe back pain, abrupt onset of back pain, or rhythmic cramping pain, which could be a sign of preterm labor.

Abdominal Pain

1. Round Ligament Pain: The Round Ligaments are the attachments on either side of the uterus that help keep it in place that ultimately attach in each labia. As the uterus grows, these ligaments are stretched extensively. Usually felt in the second trimester, round ligament pain can be felt on one side or both sides in your lower abdomen. Most often, the stretching stops feeling uncomfortable after 22 weeks or so.
 - Rest is the most helpful, as is changing positions slowly.
 - Some stretching that can be helpful includes resting with your hands and knees on the floor with your head down and your bottom in the air.
2. Braxton-Hicks Contractions: These are perceived as a tightening of the uterine muscle that is not painful. The uterus is a muscle that will begin practicing contracting as early as 14 weeks in some women. Braxton-Hicks contractions usually go away with rest.
 - Stay hydrated and rest!
 - If you are unsure if your contractions are Braxton-Hicks, or if they do not go away with rest and hydration, call your doctor.
3. Indigestion:
 - Eat at least 2-3 hours prior to lying down and use pillows to prop up your upper body. Eat small frequent meals. Avoid spicy, greasy, and/or fatty meals.
 - Tums, Maalox, Mylanta

Frequent Urination

This occurs especially in the first three months and the last month as your baby grows and pushes on your bladder. If you have any burning sensation when you urinate please call because you could have a urinary tract infection.

Fatigue

Fatigue in early pregnancy happens because your body has so many energy demands in pregnancy and often you aren't sleeping as well as usual. Fatigue usually improves after 12 to 14 weeks and returns late in pregnancy. Good nutrition, iron-rich foods and exercise help.

Breast Tenderness

Your breasts change dramatically during pregnancy. The tenderness almost always decreases by 12 to 14 weeks, although some women will continue to have some tenderness throughout their pregnancies. It can help to wear a well-fitted bra and avoid underwires.

Vaginal Discharge

It is normal in pregnancy to have an increase in discharge from your normal, pre-pregnancy baseline. It is usually a thin to moderately thick white discharge that has no particular odor associated with it. If you have itching, burning, odor, or discomfort associated with the discharge, contact your doctor immediately.

Leg Cramps

Leg Cramps could be caused by additional weight gain of pregnancy, decreased activity, or changes in the circulation to your legs. The growing uterus and baby may be putting pressure on nerves and blood vessels leading to your legs and causing the cramps. Almost 50% of pregnant women experience some leg cramping.

- Stay active, especially with stretching your calves for at least 5-10 minutes prior to bed.
- Wear support hose and supportive shoes.
- Try heat and massage.
- If you have pain in only one leg, or if you have associated swelling, redness, coldness or shortness of breath, contact your doctor immediately.

Lightheadedness

Rapid changes in position such as standing quickly or being in one position for a long period of time can interfere with blood flow in pregnancy. Some women will feel dizzy if they lay on their backs. Stay well hydrated, change positions slowly, avoid laying on your back in the second half of pregnancy. Call if you experience dizziness in other circumstances, if it happens frequently, if you faint or lose consciousness.

Moodiness

Ambivalence or mixed feelings about pregnancy are common. Women have a new baby to think about but also lots of other changes in their lives. Your role in the world is changing, relationships can change, and you may be busy or stressed making changes in your life to prepare for your new baby. Hormonal changes can also lead to mood changes. Talk to your midwife or doctor if you feel anxious or depressed, if your mood changes are impacting your relationships with others, or if you want to talk more about your moods and emotions.

Numbness or tingling of the fingers

This can occur in the second half of pregnancy because of extra fluid in the hands and wrists. It can happen on one or both sides. Avoidance of repetitive hand or wrist motion or the use of wrist splints can help. Having your baby will make this better.

Swelling

You can have swelling from increased blood in your whole body during pregnancy. Avoid standing or sitting in one position for long periods of time. Get regular exercise. Put your feet up when sitting. Swelling should be reported to your midwife or doctor if you have high blood pressure, a severe headache or changes in your vision.

Bleeding gums

Increased blood flow throughout your whole body can make the gums bleed easily. Some women grow thicker gums than usual. Daily flossing and regular brushing with a soft bristle toothbrush is recommended. You should get routine dental cleanings and dental care.

Headache

Headaches in pregnancy can be caused by muscle tension, stress, congestion, fatigue, and blood flow changes in pregnancy. Women with migraines often feel better in pregnancy. Most headaches in pregnancy can be relieved with massage, warm compresses, warm bath or shower, sleep or hydration. Headaches that are sudden, severe, don't respond to comfort measures or come with vision changes should be reported to your midwife.

Congestion

You may feel like you have a cold or allergies from the swelling of the tissues in the nasal area. Saline nose drops can help you feel better. Avoid other nose drops and sprays.

Skin Changes

1. Stretch Marks: No amount of lotion will prevent these from occurring. Some people are just more prone than others. Lotion is helpful to decrease dry, itchy skin over the abdomen.
2. Dark Pigments: Progesterone makes areas of pigmentation darker, which can be seen in your moles and freckles as well as the *linea nigra*, which is a dark line that can appear in the middle of your abdomen anywhere from your sternum to your pubic bone. Some women also get the "mask of pregnancy," or melasma, which is butterfly shaped on the cheeks and nose.
3. Varicose Veins: Avoid standing for long periods, carrying heavy weights, etc. Support hose can be helpful.

Hemorrhoids

Pregnancy is a common time to develop hemorrhoids because of constipation and increased pressure on the rectum/perineum from the uterus and increased weight.

- Avoid prolonged standing or sitting.
- Treat constipation early (high fiber diet, increase water intake, prune juice).
- Baking soda (wet or dry or in a tub) may decrease itching.
- Witch Hazel or Tucks Medicated Pads can decrease swelling.

Difficulty Sleeping

Discomforts of pregnancy can disrupt your sleep during pregnancy. Plan quiet time before going to bed and avoid caffeine. Sleeping positions:

1. On your side: If this is still uncomfortable, try sleeping with a pillow between your legs and/or a pillow beneath your abdomen. Some women enjoy a long body pillow.
2. On your back: We recommend avoiding this position not just for back discomfort, but the blood supply to the baby can be compromised after the uterus reaches the level of your belly button. Try propping a pillow on one side or the other of your back.
3. On your stomach: Once you develop a belly, this becomes difficult to do and can be uncomfortable.