



A to Z of Pregnancy health

Some conditions or symptoms are common in pregnancy. Know what they are and how you can deal with them

Most of these conditions or symptoms are caused by hormonal changes and the extra strain your body undergoes during pregnancy. These are usually temporary and may cause minor discomfort.

Backache

Cause: Strain on your back caused by your growing belly.

Symptoms: Nagging pain at the base of your back, which may spread to the upper back and shoulders in extreme cases.

Tips:

- Do not wear high-heeled shoes.
- Support your back with a cushion when seated, especially for long hours. Whenever possible, walk or do stretches at intervals.
- Avoid carrying heavy weights.

Bleeding gums

Cause: Hormonal changes may cause your gums to become softer and therefore more prone to gum disease (gingivitis) and other dental problems.

Symptoms: Reddened, swollen, tender and bleeding gums when you brush your teeth.

Tips:

- Practise good oral hygiene.
- Brush at least twice daily.
- Floss once a day.
- Have your teeth cleaned and regularly examined by your dentist.

Constipation

Cause: The hormone progesterone which increases during pregnancy slows down your digestive system and movement of the intestines. Iron supplements or a history of irregular bowel movement may worsen it.

Symptoms: Difficulty or needing to strain while trying to move your bowel.

Tips:

- Drink plenty of fluids especially water.

- Eat high-fibre foods e.g. whole-grain bread, cereals, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds.
- Do light exercises such as swimming and walking.

Dizziness

Cause: Due to hormonal changes in pregnancy. Dizziness occurs when your brain is not getting enough blood and therefore enough oxygen.

Symptoms: Feeling giddy, especially when you suddenly get up from the bed or chair, prolonged standing or lying on your back.

Tip:

- Get up slowly after sitting or lying down. If you feel faint, sit down or lie down on your side.

Frequent urination

Cause: The pressure of your growing belly on the bladder and water retention due to hormonal changes in pregnancy.

Symptoms: Needing to urinate frequently or waking up to pass urine.

Tip:

- If it is associated with pain or blood in the urine, it may be a sign of urine infection. Otherwise, the condition usually improves after pregnancy.

Haemorrhoids/piles

Cause: Hormonal changes and the increased abdominal pressure from your growing belly.

Symptoms: Lumps at the anus; painful, itchy anus; bleeding when you go to the toilet.

Tips:

- Avoid sitting or standing for long periods.
- Eat plenty of fibre and drink lots of water to prevent constipation.
- Using hot or cold compresses can relieve the discomfort.
- Usually improves after delivery.

Heartburn/Reflux

Cause: The uterus enlarges gradually during pregnancy and as it pushes on the stomach, it causes acidic contents to flow back into the oesophagus.

Symptoms: An uncomfortable or even painful burning sensation in the chest, or an “acidic” sensation in the throat, especially when lying down.

Tips:

- Eat small and frequent meals.
- Avoid eating a few hours before bedtime.
- Drink a glass of milk to ease the heartburn.
- Prop yourself up with pillows while sleeping.
- If the problem persists, tell your doctor.

Itchy skin

Cause: Your growing belly is stretching the skin on your abdomen.

Symptoms: An annoying itch over your belly.

Tips:

- Avoid very hot showers as these will make your skin drier and more itchy.
- Use a mild, fragrance-free detergent to wash your clothes.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes.
- If your itch is severe and affects the palm of your hand and soles of your feet without any rash, usually after 28 weeks, see your doctor.

Leaking urine

Cause: The extra weight gain and the pressure of your growing belly on your bladder and pelvic floor.

Symptoms: When you laugh, sneeze or run, you may leak some urine.

Tip:

- Regular pelvic floor exercises during pregnancy and after delivery helps. This condition usually improves after delivery. If it persists, talk to your doctor.



Leg cramps

Cause: Uncertain, may be due to the increasing weight of the baby putting a strain on your legs.

Symptoms: Painful muscle spasms, usually in the calves. This happens at night or when lying down.

Tips:

- When you are having the cramps, straighten your leg and point your toes towards your face, bending it at the ankle, or try walking around on your heels for a few minutes.
- Some gentle stretching exercises may help to aid circulation but remember to warm up to avoid further discomfort.

Nausea and vomiting

Cause: Hormonal changes during pregnancy. Usually occurs in the first trimester of pregnancy.

Symptoms: Feeling of nausea or throwing up often.

Tips:

- Eat small and frequent meals.
- Eat less fatty and sugary foods.
- Avoid strong smells and foods that seem to aggravate your nausea.
- Eat nutritious, dry snacks e.g. toast and crackers.
- Ginger has been shown to help with morning sickness. Try ginger ale.
- Make sure you get adequate fluids.
- See your doctor if you are not well.

Stretch marks

Cause: Pregnancy and rapid weight gain.

Symptoms: Raised, red lines on your tummy, thighs, buttocks and breasts.

Tips:

- Keep skin well-hydrated.
- Avoid rapid weight gain by eating a well-balanced diet.

Swollen feet or hands

Cause: Water retention. This may be more pronounced for those who are overweight.

Symptoms: Swelling in your ankles, feet, fingers, wrists and face, especially towards the end of the pregnancy. Stiffness of your wrist and fingers.

Tips:

- Rotating your ankles and flexing your calf muscles to improve your circulation can reduce swelling in your ankles and feet.
- Wear flat shoes and sit with your feet raised, where possible.
- Gentle massages also help.
- Cut down on your salt intake.

Vaginal discharge

Cause: Increased blood flow to the vaginal area and increase in pregnancy hormones.

Symptoms: Vaginal discharge is clear or milky and odourless. Infection may be present if an itch persists or if the discharge has an unpleasant smell.

Tip:

- See your doctor for appropriate medication.

Varicose veins

Cause: The extra weight of your baby putting pressure on the veins.

Symptoms: Extended veins in your calves, back, legs or thighs, which may throb and cause pain.

Tips:

- Get plenty of gentle exercise such as walking to work the calf muscles and improve circulation.
- Raise your feet whenever possible and if you need to stand, keep flexing your calf muscles.
- Avoid crossing your feet. Sleeping with your feet raised will help to improve the condition.