

## Common Discomforts During Pregnancy

***Nausea & Vomiting:*** This usually occurs during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy and is often referred to as “morning sickness”. However, these symptoms can occur at any time of the day or night. For some women, these symptoms continue throughout the entire pregnancy. This is caused by the reaction of the stomach and intestines to the increase in hormones related with the pregnancy.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Eat small frequent meals
- A light snack of carbohydrates (crackers, bread, etc...) before getting out of bed in the morning

\*For more information see information link on Morning Sickness

***Heartburn:*** This is caused by a bubbling of stomach acid into the esophagus. It is usually described as a burning sensation, first in the stomach and then rising into the throat.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Eat small frequent meals
- Sit upright for 30-60 minutes after eating
- Prop your head and shoulders up on a pillow while sleeping
- See approved medication list

***Flatulence (Gas):*** This is caused by a slowing of intestinal activity, leading to an accumulation of gas.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Avoid gas forming foods (e.g. cabbage family, fried foods, carbonated beverages, very sweet desserts, any food that normally does not agree with you)

***Constipation:*** This is caused by a slowing of the intestinal activity and pressure of the growing uterus. There are several other factors that can contribute to this problem during pregnancy, such as iron supplements, insufficient fluid intake, lack of exercise, and lack of sufficient fiber in the diet.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Increase fluid intake
- Increase fiber intake by eating raw fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads, and bran cereals.
- Inform your physician or nurse practitioner so they can be sure you are taking a prenatal vitamin that contains a stool softener.

***Swelling of Feet and Hands:*** This is caused by the pressure of the uterus on veins returning from the lower part of the body which interferes with normal blood flow. Fluid tends to accumulate in the extremities. If you experience any unusual or sudden swelling that does not go away, you should discuss this with your provider.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Elevate feet several times a day
- Lie on your left side to improve circulation
- Restrict intake of foods high in sodium (salt). Do not use table salt.
- Increase water intake

**Varicose Veins:** This is due to the interference of blood flow by the expanding uterus.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Elevate feet several times a day
- When you have to be on your feet, move around to encourage better circulation
- Support hose may be used to help relieve discomfort.

**Hemorrhoids:** These are varicose veins of the rectum. They are extremely common during pregnancy and in the postpartum period. Usually they shrink or resolve within the weeks following delivery.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Use the steps described above to relieve constipation since straining with bowel movements can make hemorrhoids more uncomfortable.
- Witch hazel compresses
- Sitz baths
- See approved medication

**Shortness of Breath:** This is caused by a crowding of the diaphragm by the uterus.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Some relief may be given by extending arms above head
- Sleep with head elevated on pillows

**Backache:** This is due to several body changes in pregnancy: muscle fatigue, change in the center of gravity and pressure from the growing uterus.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Avoid undue strain by using good body mechanics
- When standing for long periods, try to keep one foot on a stool or book. Change the elevated foot often.
- When you have to sit for long periods, try to get up and walk around every so often.
- Heating pad or hot compress (low to medium heat) applied to the area, 20 minutes on, 20 minutes off.
- See approved pain medication

**Leg Cramps:** This may be caused by several factors: stretching of muscles, circulatory impairment, or by a mineral imbalance.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Stand up or change position
- Apply counter pressure at the bottom of the foot
- Speak with your provider about additional supplementation

**Urinary Frequency:** This is caused by pressure on the bladder by the enlarging uterus.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Empty bladder often, to help prevent a bladder infection.

**Insomnia:** There are many possible causes, including shortness of breath, general discomfort, or anxieties about the pregnancy and baby.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Use relaxation techniques to help induce sleep
- Discuss any concerns with your provider
- See approved medication

**Vaginal Discharge:** Discharge is normally increased during pregnancy.

Prevention & Treatment:

- There is no treatment for normal pregnancy discharge. However, if the discharge has an unpleasant odor or is accompanied by itching or burning, you should report it to your provider.
- Do not douche
- Wear cotton underwear

**Itching and Stretching of Skin:** This usually occurs on the abdomen in mid to late pregnancy.

Prevention & Treatment:

- Use a non-irritating, unscented soap and rinse well
- Creams and lotions may reduce itching but will not prevent stretch marks.

These are some simple remedies for the most common discomforts. However, if problems persist or if the discomfort is extreme, please contact your provider.