



Although many weeks may pass before there are outward signs of pregnancy, tremendous changes are taking place in your body. You may feel a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. Even if you've been pregnant before, you may well find that no two pregnancies are the same, and that you have a different set of reactions and feelings to this particular pregnancy.

Here are some of the things that commonly occur, and some ideas on how to manage so you feel your best. Please ask your obstetric provider about any concerns you may have related to the changes in your body, your emotions, and your life during this special time.

Feeling tired

Many pregnant women feel more tired than usual in the first weeks of pregnancy. This is normal as your body adjusts to meeting the needs of your growing baby. Try these tips to help balance your body's need for rest and exercise.

- Try to plan extra rest periods if you can! In an important way, being tired is a signal from your body (and your baby!) that rest is needed. It will be important for you to learn to listen to these signals and take action if you can. Plan power naps at lunch or after work. Settle into bed early with a good book if your schedule permits.
- Many women find that doing mild exercise on a regular basis helps them feel less tired.
- Take your prenatal vitamins and try to eat a well-balanced diet. Good nutrition will help ensure that you have enough energy for you and your baby.

Nausea, vomiting, or heartburn

Pregnancy hormones affect the way your stomach works. They also affect your sense of smell and appetite. In some cases, this leads to nausea. Some women find that strong odors or spicy foods make nausea worse.

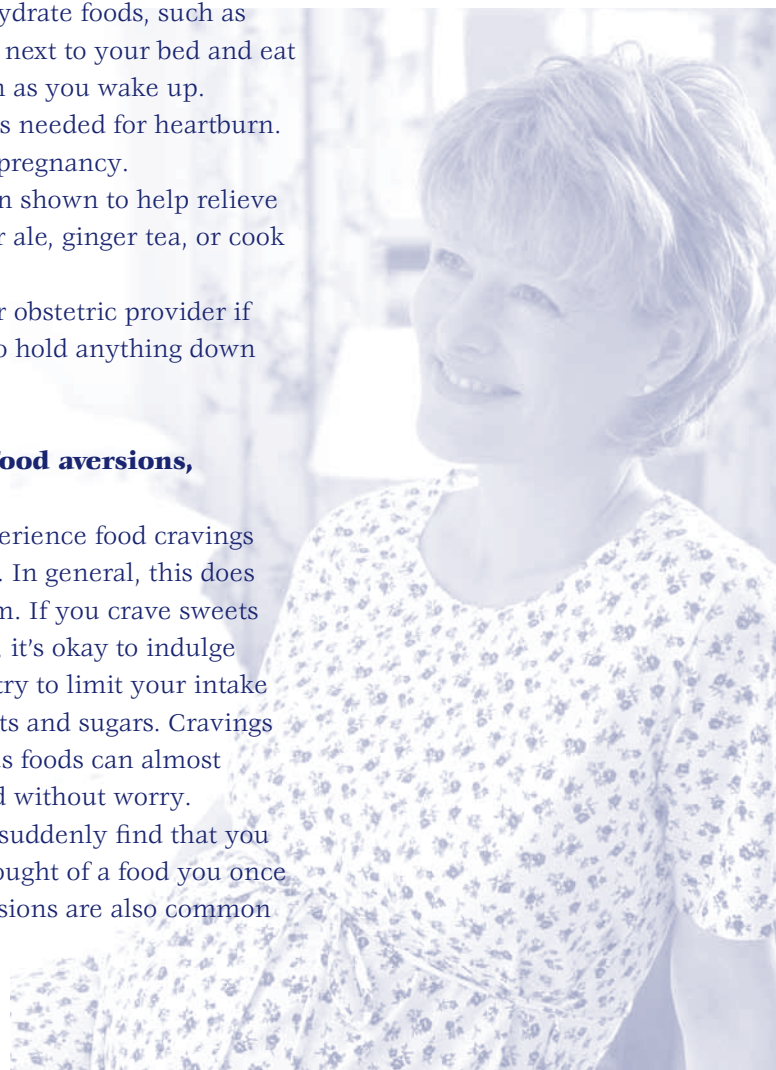
Hormones can also affect the acid in your stomach, leading to classic symptoms of heartburn or indigestion.

- Even though it may sound strange, one of the best ways to fight nausea in pregnancy is to keep food in your stomach. This means eating small amounts of food throughout the day.
- Eat as soon as you feel hungry.
- If morning nausea is a problem, keep some high-carbohydrate foods, such as crackers or bread, next to your bed and eat something as soon as you wake up.
- Take antacids as needed for heartburn. These are safe in pregnancy.
- Ginger has been shown to help relieve nausea. Try ginger ale, ginger tea, or cook with ginger.
- Please call your obstetric provider if you are not able to hold anything down for 24 hours.

Food cravings, food aversions, and hunger

Many women experience food cravings during pregnancy. In general, this does not pose a problem. If you crave sweets such as ice cream, it's okay to indulge occasionally. But try to limit your intake of foods high in fats and sugars. Cravings for more nutritious foods can almost always be satisfied without worry.

You may also suddenly find that you can't stand the thought of a food you once adored. Food aversions are also common



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now, and should not worry you as long as you continue to eat a wide variety of healthy foods. (See more tips on healthy eating in the *Eating Well* section of this packet.)

Some women are less bothered by nausea or cravings, but instead develop an unusually strong appetite, wanting to eat up to every two hours, sometimes around the clock. Once again, use common sense as you listen to your body's signals. If you find you need to eat frequently through the day (or night), stock up on nutritious, filling foods. It's usually best not to ignore intense hunger, as doing so can lead to nausea.

There is one caution about cravings. Although it may sound strange, some pregnant women have a strong desire to eat non-food items during pregnancy. This phenomenon, called pica, can cause a woman to want to eat things like dirt, ice, freezer frost, clay, or paint. It is not known why this sometimes happens. Please talk with your provider if this happens to you. Together you can plan ways to help you avoid eating substances that are not good for you or your baby.

Headaches

Pregnancy hormones can trigger headaches in some women. This may be especially true if you were prone to headaches before you got pregnant. Some women have headaches related to vision changes during pregnancy. In these cases, adjusting the eyeglass prescription may help.

☛ If headaches are severe, be sure to call your obstetric provider.

☛ Try taking acetaminophen (Tylenol) for headache. (Never take more than the recommended dose of any product containing acetaminophen.) Do **not** take other pain relievers, such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), or naproxen (Aleve).

☛ It's a good idea to have your eyes examined during pregnancy. If you wear glasses or contacts, your prescription may change. Have your eyes checked even if you've never worn glasses.

Frequent urination, leaking urine when you laugh or cough

Early in pregnancy, hormones can cause you to urinate more frequently than usual. They also relax the muscles in your genital area, which can lead to leakage of urine. Later, your baby's weight puts pressure on the bladder, which can also cause frequency and leakage.

☛ Don't be concerned about going to the bathroom a lot, unless there is pain or burning when you use the bathroom. If this happens, be sure to call for advice – you could have an infection.

☛ If you are getting up a lot at night to use the bathroom, try to stop drinking fluids a few hours before bedtime.

☛ If leakage is an issue, try learning Kegel exercises, which strengthen the muscles in your genital area. These are described in the *Staying Fit During Pregnancy* section of this packet.

☛ Empty your bladder frequently to avoid problems.

☛ Some women use a panty-liner or pad throughout pregnancy to help with leakage when they laugh or cough.

☛ The moisture from leakage of urine, combined with an increase in vaginal discharge during pregnancy, causes some women to develop irritation in the genital area. Keep the area as dry as you can.

If you wear a pad, be sure to change it frequently. Allowing the area to air-dry is also helpful – you can do this for part of each day by sleeping without underwear.

☛ If urine leakage becomes a severe or ongoing problem, now or in the future, please be sure to tell your provider.

Treatments are available that help many women.

Breast tenderness or leaking fluid from the breasts

Hormones cause your breasts to get larger during pregnancy, and can also sometimes cause fluid to leak from your breasts.

- ☛ Wear a support bra in the right size. Make sure the bra fits well.

- ☛ You may go up two or three sizes during your pregnancy. If the cost of bras is a concern, don't buy too many in one size until you get a sense of how large your breasts will get.

- ☛ Many women find sports bras comfortable during pregnancy. They provide support while also allowing room for your breasts to grow.

- ☛ Underwires may increase discomfort and constrict your breasts as they grow. But for some women, the added support of the underwire may be important. Let comfort be your guide.

Vaginal discharge

Your body naturally increases the secretions in your vagina during pregnancy. The secretions help prevent bacteria from entering the uterus.

The secretions should be white or very pale yellow. They should not be bloody, smell bad, or cause pain or itching.

- ☛ Remember, more wetness in your genital area is normal now. Practice good routine hygiene and wear cotton-crotch underpants to help feel fresh.

- ☛ Do not douche.

- ☛ Sleeping without underwear helps promote drying of your genital area.

- ☛ Tell your provider if your discharge is bloody, smells bad, or causes itching or pain.

Gas and constipation

Early in pregnancy, hormone changes affect your stomach and bowels, causing more gas and, in some women, constipation. Later, the pressure of the baby on your intestines can interfere with moving the bowels.

- ☛ All the usual diet and exercise remedies for these problems also help when you are pregnant. Drink plenty of fluids, get enough exercise, and make sure you have fiber in your diet.

- ☛ If needed, you may take a stool softener, such as Colace, or Metamucil. Please talk with your provider about whether taking a laxative is right for you.

- ☛ Kegel exercises (described in the *Staying Fit During Pregnancy* section of this packet) can sometimes help if you have problems with gas.

- ☛ Gentle heat to the abdomen may help with gas.

Hemorrhoids

Hormones cause the walls of the blood vessels in your rectum to relax, which can lead to hemorrhoids. Later, the pressure of the baby can make the problem worse. Constipation can also worsen hemorrhoids.

- ☛ Follow the advice given above on avoiding constipation.

- ☛ Use witch hazel pads (Tucks), which you can buy at the drug store.

- ☛ Hemorrhoid creams such as Preparation H are okay as well.

Changes in your legs

The weight of your baby can have an effect on the blood vessels in your legs. For some women, varicose veins become an issue during pregnancy. For others, swelling of the ankles and feet is a problem.

For mild swelling, elevating your feet and legs whenever you can is the best treatment. Try not to sit or stand without moving for long periods of time, and don't cross your legs or ankles when you sit. If you're traveling and need to be in a car or plane for an extended period, make sure to fit in a short walk at least every two hours.

For more severe swelling, or to treat swollen veins in your legs (varicose veins), you may want to try compression

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stockings. These are specially made support stockings that help move fluid and blood out of your legs and back into your circulation. The stockings come in various weights depending on the amount of support they provide. The lightest weights can be bought without a prescription. Look for JOBST or other varieties of support stockings at your local pharmacy. In more severe cases, your obstetric provider can give you a prescription for the heavier stockings that provide maximum support. Be sure to talk with your provider if leg swelling is a serious issue for you.

Emotional changes

Most women are aware of how hormones can affect mood and emotions. The hormone changes of pregnancy will probably have some effect on how you feel. In addition, just being pregnant is bound to cause strong emotions, which vary depending on whether the pregnancy was planned, whether you have people around you to provide support, and how much stress you feel in your daily life.

While “mood swings” are normal to a certain extent, some women are prone to develop problems such as depression during this time. This is especially true for women who have been depressed or have had other mental health problems in the past. Women who have close relatives who have had mental health problems may be at increased risk to develop these conditions as well.

☛ Be sure to talk with your obstetric provider about any feelings that are causing you concern.

☛ If you were taking antidepressants before becoming pregnant, talk with your obstetric provider about the medicine you have been taking. Try to have this conversation as early as possible during the course of your pregnancy. In general, it is not a good idea to stop taking antidepressants without supervision.

☛ If you have seen a therapist or counselor in the past, think about scheduling an appointment to talk over how you are feeling as your pregnancy develops.

Changes in relationships

Pregnancy is a time when relationships shift and change in new ways. Some partners pull together as they prepare for the birth of their baby – spending more time together, going to appointments, looking for baby clothes and equipment. However, pregnancy can also increase the stress or tension in a relationship. The pregnant partner may be very tired and unable to attend to other family duties. She may not be available to her partner in the same way she was before the pregnancy. The other partner may feel resentful, even jealous, of the attention focused on the baby and the upcoming birth. If there has been violence or controlling behavior in the relationship, this may get worse during pregnancy.

Now more than ever, it is important that you make sure you feel safe at home. For more information, or to talk with someone further about these issues, please call the Center for Violence Prevention and Recovery at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. The phone number is 617-667-8141.