

General Pregnancy Information: Part II

Adapted from "Great Expectations – A Guide to Enjoying Your Pregnancy", OGA

Pregnancy is a wonderful, exciting time, and there will be changes in your body that are remarkable. Sometimes these changes are downright uncomfortable and annoying...but it is all part of this journey!

Weight Gain

A few decades ago, women were advised to have a pregnancy weight gain of only 10 pounds, however today research has shed more light on requirements for healthy fetal development. Currently, the recommended range for pregnancy weight gain is 25 to 35 pounds, if you were average weight prior to your pregnancy.

Mothers who are underweight before pregnancy may gain 28 to 40 pounds. Women carrying twins may gain as much as 45 pounds. Mother who are very overweigh prior to their pregnancy should limit their weight gain to 15 to 25 pounds. Fifteen pounds should be the minimum weight gain for any pregnant woman. Remember, you will lose most of that weight gain when the baby is born, but continuing a sensible nutrition plan combined with regular exercise is essential for losing and maintaining you goal weight.

Sources of Maternal Weight Gain Sources of Fetal Weight Gain

Uterus – 2 lbs

Blood Volume – 4 lbs

Breasts – 2 lbs

Fluid – 4 lbs

Maternal Stores: (fat, protein, nutrients) – 7 lbs Fetus – 6-8 lbs

Placenta and Membranes – 1.5 lbs

Amniotic Fluid – 2 lbs

Breast Tenderness

From the beginning of your pregnancy, your breasts may become larger, firmer and more tender than usual. The areola, the darker area surrounding the nipples, may get larger and grow darker in color. At the midpoint of your pregnancy, your breast may start to secrete a fluid called colostrum in small amounts. Be sure to keep your breasts clean with frequent washings, and toward the end of your pregnancy, you may want to use nursing pads inside your bra to protect your clothes. The veins underlying your skin may also become more noticeable. This is caused by increased blood supply preparing your breast for milk production. If you are planning to breast feed your baby, no special procedures to prepare your nipples are

required although it is recommended that you keep your nipples dry and wash with warm water with no soap.

Urination

As your uterus expands as your baby grows, it puts increasing pressure on your bladder. The increased frequency to urinate is common especially in the first stages of pregnancy and in the last weeks. Please do not try to control this issue by drinking less fluids. Your baby needs for you to drink at least two quarts of water (8 full cups) a day!

Abdominal Pain

During pregnancy, you may suffer bouts of lower abdominal pain. This pain can be on one or both sides of the lower abdomen, and is usually caused by the stretching of ligaments that support the uterus and is called round ligament pain. This may also occur early on in pregnancy and feels like menstrual cramps. Constipation may also contribute to abdominal pain. Resting with a heating pad and warm showers may help, gentle massaging, taking Tylenol or trying a maternity support girdle.

If your abdominal pain is severe and persistent, PLEASE CALL YOUR DOCTOR OR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER! There can be other serious causes that may need to be evaluated.

Heartburn

Heartburn, or gastroesophageal reflux, is another common complaint of pregnant women. This is caused by the increasing size of the uterus pushing up on the stomach and increases in hormones that cause the lower part of the esophagus to relax and cause stomach acid reflux. It is safe for your baby to use an antacid like Tums or Rolaids (also provides the extra calcium that you need), but do not use baking soda or sodium bicarbonate preparations. Do not eat a large meal before going to bed, and elevate the head of your bed (you may want to use 4" of books underneath your mattress) to help prevent stomach acids from refluxing.

Nausea and Vomiting

"Morning sickness" definitely is not confined to the morning hours. Try eating more frequent smaller meals, avoiding highly spiced and acidic foods. Try lying down immediately after eating for just a few minutes to help discourage nausea. Just prior to getting up in the morning, try eating a couple of dry saltine crackers (keep them at your bedside). Few women suffer with nausea after the fourth month, but if you are finding trouble with nausea, tell your doctor. You need to keep food down for the healthy growth of your baby. Take your prenatal vitamins or iron during the time of the day when nausea is not a problem.

Headaches

Headaches are one of the most common complaints along with nausea during the first few months of pregnancy. Most headaches are caused by blood circulation changes and will usually subside after the first half of pregnancy. If you notice that your headaches are associated with sensitivity to light, excessive nausea or vomiting, fever, or other neurological signs, call your doctor or healthcare provider.

Constipation

This is also a common problem in pregnancy, so please do not hesitate to discuss this problem. One way to avoid constipation is to drink lots and lots of fluids (the best is water) while you are pregnant. Exercise everyday and eat plenty of fruits and raw vegetables. Adding bran and prunes to your diet is another natural remedy. If these don't work, try bulk-forming agents like Citrucel or Metamucil (and generic brands of these work just as well!) Your healthcare provider may prescribe other very mild laxatives or stool softener.

Backache

As your baby and uterus grows, the joints in your pelvic bones relax, which may also can cause pain in your lower back. Paying attention to good posture and wearing comfortable shoes are important, however exercise focusing on strengthening your lower back and pelvis probably contributes the most in relieving your backache. Building strong muscles helps prevent the strain caused by carrying the extra weight. Towards the end of your pregnancy, some women feel more pain and pressure at the bottom of their back, as the baby is putting pressure on the lower nerves of the back. Get on "all fours" to shift the baby's weight toward the floor when this happens to relieve pressure on the nerves.

Developing a routine of daily back and pelvic exercises from the very beginning of you pregnancy is important.

Skin Changes

Many women get changes in the color of their skin during pregnancy, related to the increasing level of hormones. Your skins may look flushed, like you are perpetually blushing. Or, if you have especially pale skin, you may develop brownish markings on your face. Some women get a dark line down the middle of their abdomen, where the skin darkens considerably from the navel to the pubic hair. Acne may be helped by pregnancy in some women, while in some women acne gets a little worse. Regardless of these changes, always wear sunscreen and avoid excess sun. Drink plenty of water to stay well hydrated. It is safe to use over-the-counter acne preparations if you have trouble with acne.

Some women, depending on your skin type and genetic tendencies, will get stretch marks on their breast, buttocks and lower abdomen. Unfortunately, there isn't much that can be done about them. Stretch marks are caused by the breakdown of elastic tissue right below the skin's surface. Excessive weight gain will make the problem worse due to increase stretching of the skin, so keeping your weight gain under control is the single best thing you can do to avoid stretch marks. Stretch marks usually get pale and become less noticeable after pregnancy.

Varicose Veins

Varicose veins or "varicosities" are caused when the veins in your legs get weak and enlarge with blood. They have to work harder to carry blood back up your legs to the heart. Sometimes pregnancy can aggravate this problem. The enlarging uterus partially cuts off the circulation from your legs. Exercise (moving the muscles around these veins) will help circulation. Don't stand for long periods of time without moving around. When you sit, prop your legs up to make the return circulation easier. Varicose

veins are usually more of a problem for women having their second or third child. But even if you are having your first baby, try to do as much as you can to aid the circulation in your legs. Take rest periods during the day with your legs up.

Short walks at different times during the day will help pump your blood faster and help the blood return from your legs. Support stockings can help tremendously, but avoid tight clothing like garters or knee highs that will only serve to cut off circulation even more. You can also get varicosities in your vulvar area during pregnancy. Again, rest periods spread out during your day will help. Place a pillow under your buttocks to elevate your hips to aid circulation from your pelvis.

Hemorrhoids

Many women suffer with hemorrhoids, which can worsen during pregnancy; or women may get hemorrhoids for the first time while they are pregnant. Hemorrhoids are actually enlarged veins (varicosities) at the anus, which is the opening of the rectum. Though they are sometimes due to the blockage of circulation caused by the increasing size of the baby, they are frequently caused by the increased straining due to constipation. If you have hemorrhoids, try lying on your side with your hips elevated on a pillow. Soaking in a warm tub can also help. Before trying any over-the-counter medications, please ask your doctor if they are safe for your baby. The medication in ointments is frequently absorbed through the skin and may affect your baby. If you suspect that your hemorrhoids are bleeding, please call your doctor.

Prevention is the key word for dealing with this problem. Be sure to drink plenty of water (8 to 10 full glasses a day) and add fresh fruits, raw vegetables and bran products to your daily diet.

Vaginal Discharge

You may notice more vaginal discharge during your pregnancy. This mucous secretion occurs from the cervix in response to the increasing hormones in pregnancy. This is a normal physical response in pregnancy and there isn't much that can be done to change the situation. However, vaginal discharges that itch or have a bad odor should be evaluated. Many women seem to get yeast infections or other vaginal infections that need treatment while they are pregnant, but these treatments are safe for the baby.

Dizzy Spells

During the early months of pregnancy, you may feel faint and light-headed all of a sudden. Some pregnant women really do faint; this is caused by the circulation changes in your body and usually subsides by the second half of pregnancy. Lying on your back towards the end of pregnancy may also cause dizziness, since your enlarged uterus slows returning blood flow; therefore lying on your left side is recommended. Also, avoid changing positions suddenly (i.e. from lying to sitting, from sitting to standing). When you are lying down, take your time easing up to a standing position in stages. If you pass out on the floor, you can injure yourself!

Emotional Changes

Many pregnant women feel happy one minute and then very tearful the next. This mood lability occurs as a part of the hormonal changes going on in your body. Mood swings are very common during pregnancy. Many women start worrying about the health of the baby and the pain of labor. She may worry about the future and how she will adjust to being a mother. The best thing to do is to discuss your worries and anxieties, and ask questions.

Depression does occur during pregnancy; in fact, if you have a personal history of depression and/or have ever been on antidepressants, the risk of you having a depressive episode during pregnancy or after pregnancy (see the section on “Postpartum Depression”) is even greater. Please do not hesitate to discuss this with your doctor. No matter how much a woman wants a baby, she may still feel unsure and inadequate at times. Communicate your feelings, even if you think they are too embarrassing to discuss. Be good to yourself, pamper yourself, and reach out to friends and family when you need comfort.

Knowledge and support can erase many of your worries; read books and websites on pregnancy and child care. Prenatal classes are a wonderful idea. If you feel depressed, be sure to talk it over with your doctor. There are effective treatments to help you.

Sexual Changes

With all your mood shifts, your feelings towards sex may also fluctuate. Desire for sex may rise and fall significantly during pregnancy. If you lose interest in sex, don't worry. It happens to many women and does not usually last long. Be sure to discuss your feelings with your partner. Remember to be good to each other and take care of each other. This is an exciting time for both of you, but it can also be a bit stressful. Remember, pregnancy is a natural process, and like any process, it has its ups and downs.

Danger Signs

Pregnancy is a normal state for women, but sometimes complications occur that require immediate attention. Almost all complications give some kind of warning sign, and you may be the first to notice a symptom that needs evaluation. Your healthcare provider will check your blood pressure, urine, weight and fetal heartbeat at each appointment because changes in these vital signs could signal a problem. Problems that are caught early have the best chance of being treated and eliminated.