

You'll probably have some of these normal (but irritating) discomforts during pregnancy. Try the following measures to help you cope with them. If you're worried, call your doctor or midwife for advice.

### **Nausea and Vomiting**

It's common to feel sick to your stomach in the first months of pregnancy. This is sometimes called *morning sickness*, but it can happen anytime. You may feel like vomiting when you haven't eaten for several hours. Or your stomach may be upset when you smell strong odors such as smoke or food cooking. Sometimes, brushing your teeth may make you feel sick.

To help prevent nausea and vomiting, try these suggestions:

- Eat 5 or 6 small meals each day to avoid having an empty stomach. Make sure you have some protein with each meal.
- Whenever your stomach feels upset, eat something you think might help you feel better. It's usually whatever food or drink sounds good at the time.
- Wear wristbands (Sea-Bands) that apply pressure on an *acupressure point* (a sensitive area) on your wrist. Sea-Bands are usually used for seasickness, but they may help with morning sickness, too. Look for them at boating, travel, or sporting goods stores.
- Eat foods that contain ginger (for example, fresh ginger, ginger ale, ginger tea, or ginger cookies).

### **Heartburn**

*Heartburn* (burping up stomach acid) is common in late pregnancy. It's caused by several factors. Pregnancy hormones relax the muscles at the top of your stomach and slow down the movement of food out of your stomach. Also, there's less room for food in your stomach as baby grows. These suggestions may help you feel better:

- Avoid eating fatty foods and foods that produce gas or cause heartburn for you.
- Eat several small meals a day rather than a few large meals.
- Raise your head and shoulders with pillows, rather than lying flat in bed.
- Take antacids (acid reducers) or other drugs to control heartburn, but only if suggested by your caregiver.

### **Constipation and Hemorrhoids**

*Constipation* (hard bowel movements) is common in pregnancy. By preventing constipation, you can relieve another common problem during pregnancy: *hemorrhoids* (swollen veins in your rectum). The following suggestions may help:

- Drink plenty of water and other fluids.
- Eat high-fiber foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole-grain cereals and bread.
- Exercise (walk) each day.
- If these measures don't help, talk to your caregiver about taking high-fiber products to soften your bowel movements. Don't take laxatives.
- Some iron pills cause constipation. If you're taking iron pills, ask your caregiver if they could cause constipation and whether you could change to a brand that is less likely to cause hard BMs.

## **Backaches**

You may get a backache as your growing belly changes your shape. Try to prevent back pain by following these simple suggestions:

- Try to have good posture to ease strain in your back. To improve your posture, stand as tall as possible, keep your chin level, and pull in your tummy.
- Be careful when lifting something heavy. Don't bend from the waist to pick it up. Bend your knees and hold it close to you as you stand up.
- Do exercises to strengthen your belly muscles and stretch your lower back muscles.

You can help treat a backache by:

- Resting or sleeping more
- Getting a massage or back rub
- Using a cold pack or heating pad
- Taking a warm bath

## **Swollen Legs and Ankles**

To reduce swelling in your feet and legs, try these comfort measures:

- Walk or move around. Avoid sitting or standing for a long period. If you have to be on your feet for a long time, shift your weight from foot to foot or march in place.
- When you sit, try to move your feet every 10 minutes by stretching and flexing your ankles. Don't cross your legs at the knees.
- Rock in a rocking chair. This helps exercise the muscles in your legs and feet.
- When resting, put your feet up.
- Ask your caregiver about wearing support stockings. To prevent swelling, put them on in the morning before your feet are swollen.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Go swimming or soak your feet in cool water.

## Leg and Foot Cramps

*Cramps* (severe pain) in the muscles of your lower legs or feet are common in late pregnancy. They usually occur when you're resting or asleep. To prevent leg cramps, avoid pointing your toes or standing on your tiptoes. To prevent toe cramps, avoid curling your toes. Also, drink plenty of water during the day to help prevent muscle cramps at night.

To relieve a muscle cramp, slowly stretch the painful muscle by following these suggestions:

- To relieve a cramp in your calf, stand with your weight on the cramped leg. Keep your leg straight and your heel on the floor. Step forward with your other leg and bend that knee. Lean forward to stretch the calf muscle of the straight leg.
- To relieve a cramp in your foot, pull your toes up toward your shin (the front of your leg). This stretches your toes and the bottom of your foot.

## Trouble Sleeping

It's common to not get a good night's sleep, especially in late pregnancy. If you can find time to exercise or take a walk during the day, it may help you sleep better at night. Don't exercise within 3 hours of bedtime.

At bedtime, try these suggestions to help you get to sleep:

- Take a warm bath.
- Drink a glass of warm milk.
- Have a massage.
- Listen to soothing music.

For more information on pregnancy:

See our books: *Pregnancy, Childbirth & the Newborn* or *The Simple Guide to Having a Baby*.  
Take a childbirth preparation class at Great Starts, or in your local community.

For parenting tips, information for families, or to talk to someone about parenting:

**In Washington State:** Call the Family Help Line at 1-800-932-HOPE

**Outside of WA:** contact your local Circle of Parents agency at [www.circleofparents.org](http://www.circleofparents.org)