

PREGNANCY AND PRE NATAL CARE

Prior to modern medicine, many mothers and their babies did not survive pregnancy and the birth process. Today, good prenatal care can significantly improve the quality of the pregnancy and the outcome for the infant and mother.

Good prenatal care includes:

- Good nutrition and healthy habits before and during pregnancy
- Frequent prenatal examinations to detect early problems

The goals of prenatal care are to:

- Monitor both the mother and baby throughout the pregnancy
- Look for changes that may lead to a high-risk pregnancy
- Explain nutritional requirements throughout the pregnancy and postpartum period
- Explain activity recommendations or restrictions
- Address common complaints that may arise during pregnancy



Women who are considering becoming pregnant, or who are pregnant, should eat a balanced diet and take a vitamin and mineral supplements as prescribed by their doctor.

Pregnant women are advised to avoid all medications, unless the medications are necessary and recommended by a prenatal health care provider. Women should discuss all medication use with their physicians.

Pregnant women should avoid all alcohol and drug use. They should not smoke. They should avoid herbal preparations and common over-the-counter medications that may interfere with normal development of the fetus.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

- Call for an appointment if you suspect you are pregnant, are currently pregnant and are not receiving prenatal care, or if you are unable to manage common complaints without medication.
- Call your health care provider if you are currently pregnant and you develop fever, chills, or painful urination.
- **Call your health care provider immediately if you are currently pregnant and notice any amount of vaginal bleeding, the membranes rupture (water breaks), or you experience physical or severe emotional trauma.**

THE FIRST TRIMESTER

Changes in Your Body

During the first three months of pregnancy, or the **first trimester**, your body undergoes many changes. As your body adjusts to the growing baby, you may have nausea, fatigue, backaches, mood swings, and stress.

Tiredness

Many women find they're exhausted in the first trimester. Don't worry, this is normal. This is your body's way of telling you that you need more rest.

- Get at least eight hours of sleep every night
- **Start sleeping on your left side.** This will relieve pressure on major blood vessels that supply oxygen and nutrients to the fetus.

Nausea and Vomiting

Usually called "morning sickness," nausea and vomiting are common during early pregnancy. For many women, though, it isn't limited to just the morning.

Try these tips to help prevent and soothe nausea:

- Eat frequent, small meals (6 to 8 small meals a day) rather than 3 large meals. Avoid fatty, fried, or spicy foods.
- Try eating starchy snacks, like toast, saltines, or dry cereals when you feel nauseated. Keep some by your bed and eat something before you get out of bed in the morning. If you feel nauseous in the middle of the night, reach for these starchy foods. It's also a good idea to keep these snacks with you at all times, in case of nausea.

If you think you might be vomiting excessively, call your doctor. If you lose too much fluid you might become dehydrated. Dehydration can be dangerous for you and your baby.

Frequency of Urination

Early in pregnancy, the growing uterus presses on your bladder. This causes frequent urination. See your doctor right away if you notice pain or a burning feeling during urination. You might have a urinary tract infection that needs treatment.

Weight gain

During the first trimester, it is normal to gain only a small amount of weight, about one pound per month.

Changes in Your Baby

By the end of the first trimester, your baby is about three inches long and weighs about half an ounce. The eyes move closer together into their positions, and the ears also are in position. Even though you can't feel your baby move yet, your baby will move inside you in response to pushing on your abdomen.

THE SECOND TRIMESTER

Changes in Your Body

Some of the following aches and pains may make their first appearance during the second trimester:

- Pain in the abdomen, groin, and thighs
- Backaches
- Shortness of breath
- Stretch Marks and Skin Changes

- **Call your doctor if you have nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, jaundice (the skin turns yellow) or fatigue combined with itching.** These can be signs of a liver problem.

Weight Gain

Everyone gains weight at different rates. On average, it is normal to gain about one pound per week, or about three to four pounds per month during this trimester.

Changes in Your Baby

By the end of the second trimester your baby will weigh about 1 3/4 pounds and be about 13 inches long. With this growth comes the development of fingers, toes, eyelashes, and eyebrows. **Around the fifth month, you might feel your baby move.** By the end of this trimester, all of your baby's essential organs like the heart, lungs, and kidneys are formed.

THE THIRD TRIMESTER

Changes in Your Body

Some of the discomforts you had in your second trimester will continue. Plus, many women find breathing even more difficult and notice they have to go to the bathroom even more often. This is because the baby is getting bigger and it is putting more pressure on your organs. Don't worry, your baby is fine and these problems will lessen once you give birth.

The following aches and pains often appear for the first time during the third trimester:

- Heartburn
- **Swelling of the ankles, fingers, and face. If you notice any sudden or extreme swelling or if you gain a lot of weight really quickly, call your doctor right away.**
- Tender breasts
- Trouble sleeping

Weight Gain

Everyone gains weight at different rates. On average, it is normal to gain about one pound per week, or three to four pounds per month, during the third

trimester. **By the end of your pregnancy you should have gained, on average, about 25 to 30 pounds. About 7 1/2 pounds of that weight should be the baby.**

Changes in Your Baby

Your baby is still growing and moving, but now it has less room in your uterus. Because of this, you might not feel the kicks and movements as much as you did in the second trimester.

As your body prepares for birth, the baby will start to move into its birth position. You might notice the baby "dropping," or moving down lower in your abdomen. This can reduce the pressure on your lungs and rib cage, making it easier to breathe.

At birth, the average baby is 20 to 22 inches long and weighs 7 1/2 pounds.

Sleeping in the 3rd Trimester

Your energy may lessen as you enter the ninth month. So you may begin to slow down. This is normal. It's important to get enough rest now, even though it can be more difficult to sleep, as you get larger. The baby's movements, bathroom runs, and an increase in your body's metabolism can make sleeping difficult.

Try these tips for sleeping in the last three months of pregnancy:

- Avoid eating large meals three hours before going to bed
- Do mild exercise like walking
- **Avoid taking long naps during the day**
- Talk with your partner or friends to relieve stress

Many women find childbirth classes very helpful, even if they have already had a baby. Women often bring their partners or a friend or relative to childbirth classes, particularly if this person will be with them during the birth of their baby.

The Importance of Breastfeeding

If you haven't thought about whether you will breastfeed or bottle-feed your baby, it is time to start. You should learn more about both options and make a

decision about what you plan to do. **Breastfeeding is much better than formula feeding for your baby's health and your own.** Find out all the facts about breastfeeding. Talk to your doctor or a pediatrician about breastfeeding.

When to Call Your Doctor

Before your due date, make sure to talk with your doctor about how to reach him or her if you go into labor. It's also helpful to be familiar with the hospital or birthing center, where you should park, and where to check in ahead of time. Know that sometimes you might think you're in labor, but really are not (called false labor). This happens to many women, so don't feel embarrassed if you go to the hospital certain that you are in labor, only to be sent home.

SIGNS OF LABOR

- **Contractions at regular and increasingly shorter intervals that also become stronger in intensity.**
- Lower back pain that doesn't go away. You might also feel premenstrual and crampy.
- **Your water breaks** (can be a large gush or a continuous trickle) and you have contractions.
- A bloody (brownish or blood-tinged) mucous discharge. This is the mucous plug that blocks the cervix. Labor could be at any time, or days away.
- Your cervix is dilating (opening up) and becoming thinner and softer. During a pelvic exam, your doctor will be able to tell if these things are happening.