

Common discomforts of pregnancy

Most of these discomforts are common side effects of pregnancy. But in some cases, they may be signs of more serious problems. **Tell your health care provider if you have any of these discomforts during pregnancy.**

1. Backache

Backaches are common during pregnancy, especially in the later months.

What you can do:

- Stand and sit up straight.
- Avoid twisting movements.
- Don't lift heavy things.
- Get a prenatal back massage.
- Sleep on a firm mattress.
- Do lower-back exercises.
- If your back pain is severe, ask your health care provider for a referral to a back pain specialist.

2. Breast changes

You may notice these changes to your breasts during pregnancy:

- Breast tingling, swelling and tenderness are caused by increased amounts of hormones in your body.
- Your breasts get bigger as your milk glands get bigger and you build up fat in your breasts. By 6 weeks, your breasts may have grown a full cup size or more.
- Itchiness and stretch marks are caused when your breasts grow and your skin stretches.
- Leaking may happen by 12 to 14 weeks of pregnancy. The leaking is colostrum, the fluid that feeds your baby for the first few days after birth before your breasts start to make

milk. Colostrum may leak on its own, or it may leak when you're having sex or putting pressure on your breasts.

What you can do:

- Wear a support or maternity bra. These bras usually include extra hooks so you can adjust the size as your body changes. Wear the bra when you sleep to help make you more comfortable during the night.
- Put breast pads in your bra if you're leaking colostrum.
- Don't use soap on or around your nipples. It can dry out the skin.

3. Constipation

Constipation is when it's hard to have a bowel movement. It's a common problem during pregnancy. It's caused by hormone changes and the pressure of your growing belly on your intestines.

What you can do:

- Drink six to eight glasses of water each day.
- Eat high-fiber cereals, whole-grain bread and pasta, fruits and vegetables.
- Do something active every day.
- Eat dried fruit, like prunes or dates, every day.
- Ask your health care provider about medicines you can take.



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4. Heartburn

You may have heartburn for the first time during pregnancy, especially during the second and third trimesters.

What you can do:

- Eat small, low-fat meals and snacks.
- Eat slowly.
- Drink fluids between meals, not with meals.
- Don't eat spicy foods.
- Wait 1 to 2 hours after eating to lie down, especially before bedtime.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Ask your health care provider if you can take an antacid.

5. Varicose veins and swollen legs

Varicose veins are enlarged veins that are raised above the skin's surface. Swollen legs during pregnancy can make varicose veins worse.

What you can do:

- Rest with your legs up.
- Wear support tights or stockings.
- Get up and move around often.

6. Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in and around the anus that may hurt or bleed. Lots of women get them during pregnancy.

What you can do:

- Soak in a warm bath.
- Use an over-the-counter spray or cream to help relieve pain. Ask your provider which ones are OK to use.
- Eat foods that are high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables and whole-grain breads and cereals.
- Drink lots of water.
- Try not to strain when you're having a bowel movement.

7. Leg cramps

Leg cramps may be caused by too little calcium and potassium in your body.

What you can do:

- Drink milk, eat dairy products and eat foods high in potassium, like bananas.
- To ease a cramp, extend your leg out straight and flex your foot so that your toes come toward your body.

8. Morning sickness (also called nausea and vomiting of pregnancy or NVP)

Morning sickness is nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) and vomiting that happens during pregnancy, usually in the first few months. It can last all day and happen any time of day or night.

What you can do:

- Eat five or six small meals a day and drink lots of water.
- Eat foods—like cereal, rice and bananas—that are easy to digest. Don't eat spicy or fatty foods if they upset your stomach.
- Eat healthy snacks between meals to keep your stomach from being empty.
- Eat a few crackers before you get up in the morning to settle your stomach. Keep them by your bed.
- Tell your provider if these tips don't work to ease your morning sickness, you're losing weight or you can't keep any food or drink down. Your provider may be able to prescribe medicine to help you feel better that's safe for you and your baby.

9. Sciatica

Sciatica is pain down the leg that can get worse as your baby begins to put pressure on the sciatic nerves. These nerves run from the spine through the pelvis and down the legs. Sciatica usually starts in the buttocks and moves down the back of the thigh. Sometimes it can cause leg numbness or weakness.

What you can do:

Lie on your side on a firm mattress.

10. Stomach aches and pains

It's normal to have aches and pains as your belly stretches to make room for your growing baby.

What you can do:

Call your health care provider, especially if you have stomach pain with other symptoms, like vomiting.

11. Feeling tired

Your body works hard during pregnancy. You may need more rest than you did before you got pregnant.

What you can do:

- Take short rests during the day.
- Go to bed a little earlier each night.
- Ask your partner to help around the house to give you time to rest.
- If you're so tired you can't do your normal activities, tell your provider.

12. Urine leakage

Urine leakage is caused by the weight of your baby pressing down on your bladder.

What you can do:

- Wear a sanitary pad or panty liner.
- Do pelvic exercises (also called Kegel exercises) to help strengthen the muscles that control the flow of urine. To do them, squeeze the muscles you use to stop yourself from urinating. Hold the muscles tight for 10 seconds and then release.

13. Vaginal discharge

You may have an increase in vaginal discharge during pregnancy. The discharge should be clear and look like mucus.

What you can do:

- Wash with a mild soap.
- Don't douche. Douching means using water or other liquids to clean the vagina.
- Tell your provider if you see blood or if you have a lot of discharge that smells bad or causes itching or burning. These could be signs of infection.