

Common Discomforts & Annoyances of Pregnancy

All these discomforts/annoyances are a common part of pregnancy and usually end eventually. Try the hints given below. If you don't get relief, talk to your provider or nurse about other possible measures to try.

Discomfort	When	What you can do to help	Notify provider if:
Ankle/foot swelling	Second trimester until delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While sitting, prop your feet up (even a few inches up helps) and do not cross your legs. • Continue drinking lots of fluids (at least 8 glasses daily). • Wear comfortable shoes or sandals and avoid high heels. • Consider support hosiery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redness in legs • Increasing pain/redness in calves
Breast tenderness	Begins early and continues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear well fitted, good support or athletic bra day and night. • Soak in a warm bath. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redness in breast • Fever
Breast leakage	May begin second trimester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear pads in bra. • Avoid harsh soaps or creams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red/pinkish discharge from breasts • Fever
Bleeding gums	Entire pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a very soft tooth brush. • Get routine dental care. • Gently brush teeth at least twice daily. • Floss daily. • Use good dental hygiene. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than slight bleeding from gums • Pain in teeth • Pus from gums
Constipation	Entire pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat foods high in fiber (bran, green leafy vegetables, whole grain cereals/breads, fruits) daily. • Drink at least 8 - 10 glasses of fluids daily. • If approved by your provider, exercise daily (this will help move food through the bowel). • Walk after meals. • Do not take stool softeners, laxatives, or enemas unless you talk with your provider. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blood in stool • Abdominal pain • No bowel movements over extended period of time

Discomfort	When	What you can do to help	Notify provider if:
Contractions (Braxton Hicks)	After 20th week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know this is part of your uterus getting “ready” for labor. • Empty bladder and drink 2 - 3 glasses of water. • Lie down on your side with hands on belly. • Keep track of how often these occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular contractions that do not go away • Painful contractions • No improvement in symptoms • History of preterm labor
Dizziness	As your uterus enlarges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move slowly when getting up from lying down or sitting. • Eat small, frequent meals and healthy snacks with protein to avoid low blood sugar. • Drink lots of fluids especially if exercising or in hot weather. • If dizzy, lie down on your side. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent dizziness • Feeling faint • You have diabetes • Shortness of breath/ chest pain • Vaginal bleeding or abdominal pain
Enlarging belly and breasts	Second half of pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleep on your side with a pillow between your legs. • Wear loose, comfortable clothes. • Wear support bra even to bed. • Use maternity support belt. 	
Fatigue or tiredness	Early in pregnancy and again in the last month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take extra naps during the day if possible. • Avoid fluids before bedtime. • Continue mild exercise but not to the point of exhaustion. • Try to get at least 8 hours sleep at the same time each night. 	
Flatulence (gas)	Anytime, especially after 20 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat foods high in fiber daily. • Drink at least 8 glasses of water daily. • Avoid gas-forming foods such as beans, cabbage and sodas. • If approved by your provider, exercise daily. • Walk after meals. 	
Food cravings	First half of pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OK to indulge if food choice is not harmful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craving excessive ice • Craving non-food items (dirt/paint)

Discomfort	When	What you can do to help	Notify provider if:
Frequent urination	Begins early, gets better mid-pregnancy, then increases towards the end of pregnancy when baby drops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't cut back on fluids. • Know bathroom locations. • Expect to make many trips to the bathroom, day and night. • Avoid drinking lots of fluids before bedtime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain or burning with urination • History of urinary tract or kidney infection • Fever/chills/sweats • Pelvic, back, stomach, or side pain
Headaches	First half	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use mild pain relievers such as Tylenol® as directed • Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen and other pain medications, unless you have discussed their use with your healthcare provider. • Avoid eyestrain. • Rest eyes frequently and take frequent computer breaks. • Get gentle massages and do mild stretching exercises. • Drink plenty of water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent headache not relieved by over-the-counter (OTC) medication • Worse headache of your life • Associated with vision changes
Heartburn	Second trimester until delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat 6 - 8 small meals daily. • Eat slowly, chew food well. • Avoid deep fried, greasy, and spicy foods. • Drink fluids between your meals. • Avoid citrus fruits or juices. • Go for a walk after meals. • Avoid lying down right after eating. • Antacids can help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent heartburn not relieved by antacids • Associated with persistent nausea and vomiting
Hemorrhoids	Anytime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent constipation - try not to strain with bowel movement. • Apply hemorrhoid ointment as needed (discuss with provider). • Apply witch hazel pads. • Take sitz baths. • Do your Kegel exercises (see prenatal fitness brochure). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bleeding hemorrhoids • Persistent pain from hemorrhoids

Discomfort	When	What you can do to help	Notify provider if:
Increased perspiration	Anytime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase fluids intake. • Wear easily washable, comfortable, loose fitting clothing. • Practice good hygiene. 	
Increased saliva	First trimester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gum and hard candy - watch excess calories. • Use mouthwash. • Avoid starches. 	
Increased vaginal discharge	Entire pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear cotton underwear. • Avoid nylon underwear/panty hose, feminine hygiene soaps or sprays. • Do not douche. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellow or greenish, thick and cheesy, or has a strong fish-like odor • Soreness, itching or burning
Leg cramps	Second half of pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra potassium or calcium may help. Try eating a banana every day or drinking a glass of milk. • Gently stretch by - sitting down, extending legs and flexing toes towards body (grab toes if you can and pull towards yourself). Your partner can help with this. • Mild exercise may help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worsening cramps/pain especially in the back of calves/legs • Redness/swelling in calves
Ligament pain (sharp pulling sensation on either side of the lower abdomen)	Increases with increasing uterine size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support your weight with your hands when changing positions. • Move slower. • A mild analgesic may help. • Apply ice to affected side. • Use maternity girdle/belt for support. • Lean back in a slant position supporting your back with your knees bent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worsening pain

Discomfort	When	What you can do to help	Notify provider if:
Light headed & dizzy	Begins early and continues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop what you are doing and lie on your left side with your legs up for short period of time. • If unable to lie down, sit immediately and tell someone you are dizzy. • If dizziness resolves, get up slowing from lying to sitting, then up to standing position if possible. • Ensure adequate hydration by drinking plenty of water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated episodes • Associated with other symptoms such as chest pain/shortness of breath • Loss of consciousness
Low backache	Second half of pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See page 114. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See page 114.
Nasal stuffiness & bleeding	First trimester and again at term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a saline nasal spray. • Use cool mist humidifier/ vaporizer if air is dry. • Talk with your provider about OTC medications. • Avoid using nasal decongestant sprays. • Blow your nose gently. • Ensure adequate hydration by drinking plenty of fluids. • Stop bleed by squeezing nose between thumb and forefinger for a few minutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If nasal bleeding is frequent
Nausea (Morning Sickness)	Occurs in early pregnancy and usually improves after first trimester.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See page 113. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See page 113.
Numbness/ tingling fingers/ hands (Carpel Tunnel Syndrome)	Second and third trimester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate hands and wrists as much as possible. • Rest hands with frequent breaks. • Talk with your provider about wrist splints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your hands are weak and not just numb

Discomfort	When	What you can do to help	Notify provider if:
Sleeplessness	Anytime but especially last trimester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try a warm bath before bedtime. • Avoid stimulating activity before bedtime • Avoid drinks containing caffeine. • Use relaxation techniques. • Get in a comfortable position to sleep; place pillows between legs. • Try a glass of milk before going to bed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your provider If you are feeling very stressed, depressed or nervous about your pregnancy
Varicose veins	Increases as pregnancy progresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid tight clothing and stockings. • Avoid crossing legs. • Practice good posture. • Put support hose, ace wraps or elastic stockings on in bed before lowering feet - wear all day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Painful bulging veins • Redness in area of veins • Leg cramps
Vision changes	Entire pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't buy a new prescription for your glasses as you will probably return to pre-pregnant vision after delivery. • Take frequent eye breaks. • May not be able to wear contact lenses during pregnancy. • Wear glasses as prescribed for reading/distance vision and for driving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blurry (fuzzy) vision • Seeing black spots or shadows • Headache • Loss of vision

Nausea and Vomiting in Pregnancy

(aka “morning sickness”)

Nausea can occur during early pregnancy. It usually gets better after the first trimester.

What can you do?

- Nibble some plain crackers, dry toast, dry cereals before getting out of bed in the morning and when you are feeling queasy
- Eat six to eight small meals throughout the day instead of big meals
- Try eating protein snacks
- Get plenty of rest
- Avoid odors or foods that set off the nausea
- You may have to avoid prenatal vitamins during the first trimester if they seem to worsen the nausea
- Drink liquids between meals not with meals
 - Avoid dehydration by drinking water and nutritious smoothies and eating ice chips
 - Sip on ginger ale, water, weak tea, or mild fruit juices
 - Try diluting a sports drink with half water and sip on this liquid all day
- Avoid greasy or spicy foods
- Chew gum or suck on hard candy (mints/ginger) or ice chips
- Sit and put your head down between your legs
- Motion/Sea sickness bands may help
- Acupuncture may be helpful

Notify your provider if you

- Cannot keep down any liquids or food
- Have nausea that does not go away
- Have more than three to five pounds of weight loss since becoming pregnant
- Have vomiting that is blood tinged
- Have flu-like symptoms or fever
- Feel faint

Low Back Pain

Low back pain in pregnancy is the most common discomfort of pregnancy.

Why does it happen?

- Strain of back muscles
- Uterus gets bigger and center of gravity changes - thus posture changes.
- Hormones cause ligaments to relax and joints to loosen.

What can you do?

- Use good body mechanics.
- Keep your back straight and your head up.
- Avoid lifting heavy objects by yourself.
- Avoid flat or high heeled shoes (low heel with arch support is best).
- Sleep on a firm mattress (or place a board between mattress and box spring).
- When bending to pick something up, bend from your knees (not waist).
- Gently massage lower back or apply hot/cold compress.
- Take a warm soak in a bathtub - no bubbles. (Make sure to have good grip on hand rail when exiting tub to prevent a fall.)
- Take a warm shower with pulsating/heavy stream aimed at lower back area.
- When sitting, place a small pillow behind your lower back for support.
- Avoid standing for long periods of time.
- If standing for an extended period, prop one foot up on a stepstool or stair, this helps straighten the small of your back.
- Sleep on your side and place a pillow between your legs.
- Stretch and stay active in pregnancy (talk with your provider before starting a new exercise program).
 - Forward bend - Sit in a chair, feet flat on ground bend head/shoulders forward to the knees.
 - Pelvic rock exercises - When on hands and knees, stretch your lower back – arch so back is rounded, then relax it back to original position. Use your stomach muscles to keep your back straight when relaxing.
- Talk with your provider about over the counter pain medication if needed.
- Consider a maternity girdle for support.

Contact provider if any of the following occur

- Severe pain
- Intermittent pain (comes and goes)
- Burning with urination
- Vaginal bleeding
- Pain lasting more than two weeks
- Tingling/numbness in lower legs