Comfort and Safety During Pregnancy

This handout describes symptoms many women have during pregnancy. You may have none, only a few, or you may have many of them. We hope these tips help make you feel more comfortable. If you have concerns or questions, please contact your health care provider. See Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn, pages 24 to 33 and pages 45 to 48.

Feeling Tired

Why: Changing hormones, increased metabolism, and possibly anemia can make you feel tired.

This might help:
• Get more sleep than usual.
• Listen to your body and take naps.

Breast Discomfort

Why: The milk glands are developing and expanding.

This might help:
• Wear a larger, more supportive bra, or a nursing bra.
• Use cold compresses (for example, a washcloth dipped in cold water) on your breasts as needed. See Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn, pages 426 to 428.

Urinating Often

Why: The expanding uterus puts pressure on your bladder, and your kidneys are working more efficiently. This symptom occurs most often in the first and third trimesters.

This might help:
• Avoid liquids close to bedtime.
• Accept that you will be getting up at least once a night to urinate. Think of it as good preparation for parenting!
Headaches and Vision Changes

*Why:* These are caused by nasal congestion, fatigue, eyestrain, anxiety, and tension. Check with your health care provider before taking any medicines – even if they’re over-the-counter remedies. Vision changes are often related to increased water retention and are temporary. However, because they may be an early symptom of pregnancy-induced high blood pressure, tell your health care provider if you have vision changes.

*This might help:*

- Drink more water and eat something. Headaches, nose and head stuffiness, and nausea often are better with water, juice, and a snack.
- Relax and rest.
- Use a hot, moist towel over your eyes and forehead. See *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn*, page 116.

Nausea and Vomiting

*Why:* These are caused by changing hormones.

*This might help:*

- Eat small, frequent meals (about every 2 hours) so your stomach is never empty. See *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn*, pages 95 to 97.
- Eat a few crackers (or any other food you can tolerate) before getting out of bed in the morning, and even during the night, if you wake up.
- Eat a protein snack such as cheese, eggs, meat, fish, nuts, or peanut butter at bedtime.
- Eat crystallized ginger or drink ginger tea, which may help to settle your stomach.

If you have diabetes, consult with your provider on how to deal with nausea and vomiting.
Heartburn

*Why:* Caused by hormonal and physical changes.

*This might help:*

- Avoid foods that cause stomach distress and a burning sensation. Some of these may be carbonated beverages, caffeine, chocolate, high-acid foods like citrus fruits and juices, tomatoes, mustard, vinegar, and spicy, highly seasoned, fried, and fatty foods.
- Don’t eat big meals. Eat several small meals throughout the day.
- Drink liquids between meals, instead of “washing down” food at mealtime.
- Don’t eat close to your bedtime. Give yourself 2 to 3 hours to digest before lying down.
- Sleep propped up with pillows or a wedge.
- Try an over-the-counter antacid as approved by your provider.

Weight Gain and Nutrition

- Weight gain in the first trimester is small (1 to 4 pounds).
- A weight gain of 25 to 35 pounds by the end of pregnancy is best for producing a healthy baby.
- If you were underweight or overweight prior to getting pregnant, your health care provider may suggest a different weight range.
- Eat the proper foods during your entire pregnancy, and take your prenatal vitamins.
- Your protein needs *increase* during pregnancy. You should eat 8 to 9 ounces (55 to 65 grams) of protein per day. Protein foods include meat, fish, poultry, eggs, tofu, peanut butter, cheese, and yogurt.
- It is important to drink plenty of water during your pregnancy. Drink 8 to 12, 8-ounce glasses of water daily.
- If you have concerns or questions, talk to your health care provider. Nutrition consults are also available.
• Meat should be thoroughly cooked (see “Toxoplasmosis” on page 19, and “Listeriosis” on page 20).

• These nutrients are of special importance in pregnancy:
  
  - **Calcium** for strong bones – found in milk, cheese, yogurt, broccoli, kale, cabbage, seafood, tofu, sesame seeds, blackstrap molasses, white beans, almonds, and brazil nuts. If you cannot tolerate milk products (due to nausea or feeling sick), try other sources such as enriched soy or rice milk. You may need a calcium supplement. Discuss this with your provider. Your calcium needs are 1,300 mg per day.

    Tip: Iron and calcium “compete” for absorption. Therefore, it is best to eat these foods or take these supplements separately for best absorption (about 1½ hours apart).

  - **Iron** for healthy blood – found in red meats, spinach, enriched breads and cereals (such as Cream of Wheat), beans, dried fruit, and peanut butter. Your iron needs are 30 mg per day.

    Tip: Have a vitamin C source, such as 4 ounces of juice or fruit, along with your iron to improve absorption.

  - **Folic acid** for blood and new cells – found in dark green vegetables, liver, yeast, nuts, legumes, and whole grains. See Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn, pages 87 to 98.

**Safety Issues**

There are many things you can do to make pregnancy a safe time for you and your unborn baby.

**DO THESE:**

**When Riding in the Car**

• Always wear your seat belt – both the lap belt, low on your abdomen, and the shoulder harness.

• On long car trips, try to stop every hour and take a short walk to enhance circulation.
Dental Health

- Make sure your dentist and hygienist (as well as other health care providers) know you are pregnant.
- Visit your dentist early in your pregnancy. Gum tenderness and swelling are common in pregnancy due to increased blood volume and circulation. Mothers with chronic gum disease may be at risk for preterm or low birthweight infants. See *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn*, page 79.

Exercise

- In most cases, it is safe to stay at the activity level that your body is used to. If you do vigorous exercise such as running on a regular basis, discuss this with your health care providers; most recommend low-impact exercise later in your pregnancy.
- Swimming and walking are always good choices in a normal, healthy pregnancy. Don’t exercise to the point of being out of breath. You should be able to have a conversation while exercising.
- Be sure to drink plenty of water before and after you exercise.
- Wear proper clothing, and don’t get too hot.
- You may want to do Kegel exercises, which strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. You can learn to do these when you are urinating. After starting to urinate, stop the flow by contracting those muscles hard. Hold as long as you can, then release, and tighten again for as long as you can. After you have learned which muscles to tighten and release, try to do Kegel exercises several times a day. See *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn*, pages 123 to 143.

Sexuality

- You may notice increased or decreased desire for sexual activity during pregnancy.
- Some women become less interested in sex during the third trimester.
• Intercourse throughout pregnancy is safe. If your pregnancy is high-risk, talk with your health care provider about precautions related to sexual relations.

• It is OK to have an orgasm during pregnancy, as long as your pregnancy is not high-risk. An orgasm may feel like a contraction.

• Avoid sexual activities that involve air being blown into the vagina or vigorous rear-entry intercourse. These activities may push air into the vagina, which could cause an air bubble to enter your circulatory system; this can be dangerous. See Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn, pages 39 to 40.

AVOID THESE:

Alcohol

• Alcohol passes through the placenta to the baby.

• A mother who drinks alcohol is at risk for having a baby with fetal alcohol syndrome, or fetal alcohol effects, which may include mental retardation.

• Pregnancy is the time to stop drinking alcohol. Ask your health care provider for help. See Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn, pages 108 to 109.

Cigarettes

• Smoking cigarettes constricts your blood vessels, including those in the placenta. This decreases the oxygen, fluid, and nutrients passed by the placenta to your unborn baby.

• Babies whose mothers smoked during pregnancy are smaller, and are more likely to be premature and to have birth defects and learning disabilities after the birth than babies whose mothers stopped smoking during pregnancy.

• Babies and children who are exposed to cigarette smoke are more likely to have asthma and respiratory infections.

• Stop smoking during pregnancy. Ask your health care provider for help. See Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn, pages 109 to 110.
**Douching**

- Avoid douching at all times, as it can change the pH (acid/alkaline) balance of the vagina, making you more prone to vaginal infections.
- In rare cases, douching can cause an air bubble to enter your circulatory system, which can be life-threatening.

**Drugs and Medicines**

- Discuss all over-the-counter drugs and prescribed drugs with your health care provider before you take them. All over-the-counter drugs may have dangerous side effects to you and your developing baby.
- Illegal drugs pass through the placenta to the baby and cause many problems, such as smaller babies, sicker babies, and premature birth, as well as other problems after birth. Talk to your health care provider if you need help to stop using these drugs. See *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn*, pages 112 to 115.

**Hot Tubs**

- Avoid water above 100°F (hot tub, sauna, etc.) throughout pregnancy, especially in the first three months. Hot tubs or saunas could increase your body temperature and cause problems with cell division, increasing the risk of birth defects or miscarriage. See *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn*, page 118.

**Toxoplasmosis**

Toxoplasmosis is caused by a microscopic organism found in cat feces. It causes a flu-like illness that affects a pregnant woman only mildly, but can seriously affect a fetus. Toxoplasmosis is rare in the U.S., but it is still wise to be careful:

- If you have cats, have someone else clean the cat litter box while you are pregnant.
- Wear gloves when you garden. Wash your hands with warm water and soap after gardening.
- Toxoplasmosis may also be caused by eating raw or undercooked meats (especially pork, lamb, or venison) or unwashed root vegetables such as carrots. Be sure to cook meat thoroughly and wash or peel root vegetables. See *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn*, page 119.
Contact with Rodents

Rodents carry a virus called LCMV (Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis Virus) that can be very harmful to your unborn baby. Pregnant women should avoid contact with rodents, including pets such as hamsters and guinea pigs, and rodent droppings whenever possible. Follow these instructions to reduce the risk of LCMV infection:

- If you suspect there are mice in your home, call a professional pest control company or have another member of the household remove them. Avoid vacuuming or sweeping rodent urine, droppings, or nesting materials.
- Ask a friend or family member who does not live with you to care for pet rodents in their home while you are pregnant. If this is not possible, keep the pet rodent in a separate part of the home and have another family member or friend care for the pet and clean its cage. Avoid being in the same room where the rodent is kept.
- If you have contact with a wild rodent or its urine, droppings, or nesting materials, thoroughly wash your hands afterward.

Listeriosis

Listeriosis is an infection that results from eating contaminated foods. Pregnant women are about 20 times more likely than other adults to get listeriosis. Listeriosis can be transmitted to the fetus through the placenta even if the mother is not showing signs of illness.

Because the symptoms of listeriosis can take days or weeks to show, may be mild or even absent, it is very important to take appropriate food safety precautions during pregnancy:

- **Do not eat** hot dogs, luncheon meats, or deli meats unless reheated until steaming hot.
- **Do not eat** soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined cheeses, and Mexican-style cheeses.
- **Do not eat** refrigerated smoked seafood **unless** it is an ingredient in a **cooked** dish such as a casserole.
- **Avoid** salad bars, deli counters, buffets, and sidewalk vendors.

Parasites

- Parasites may be found in raw fish.
## Mercury and Chemicals in Fish

See the lists below, which will help you know which fish you can eat and how often. They also list fish that should be avoided by pregnant women and nursing mothers.

### 2 to 3 Meals Per Week

- Anchovies
- Butterfish
- Catfish
- Clams
- Cod (Pacific and Atlantic)
- Crab (blue, king, and snow from the U.S., Canada, and Russia)
- Crab, imitation
- Crayfish
- Flounder/Sole (Pacific and Atlantic)
- Herring
- Mackerel (canned)
- Oysters
- Pollock/Fish sticks
- Salmon (fresh and canned): Chinook (coastal, Alaska), Chum, Coho, farmed (Atlantic), pink, sockeye
- Sardines
- Scallops
- Shrimp (from U.S. and imported)
- Squid/Calamari
- Tilapia (from U.S., Central America, China and Taiwan)
- Trout
- Tuna (canned light)

### 1 Meal Per Week

- Black sea bass
- Chilean sea bass
- Chinook salmon (Puget Sound)
- Croaker (white, Pacific)
- Halibut (Pacific and Atlantic)
- Lobster (from U.S. and Canada)
- Mahi mahi
- Monkfish
- Rockfish
- Rockfish/Red snapper (trawl caught)
- Sablefish
- Tuna (canned white Albacore, trawl caught in WA, OR, or CA)

### Avoid

- Mackeral (King)
- Marlin
- Shark
- Swordfish
- Tilefish
- Tuna steak

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An adult meal size is about 8 oz. uncooked fish. A seafood meal appropriate for your body size is about the size and thickness of your hand.
Questions?

If the fish you would like to eat is not on this list, call the Department of Health at 877-485-7316 (toll-free) for information.

**Biotoxins in Shellfish**

Before eating fish, shellfish, or crab, check to make sure the waters it came from are safe. Eating contaminated shellfish can cause serious illness or death. Visit [www.doh.wa.gov/biotoxinmaps.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/biotoxinmaps.htm), or call the Shellfish Biotoxin Hotline at 800-562-5632.

Your questions are important. If you have questions about yourself, call your obstetric provider during office hours. Clinics are closed 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. and on weekends.

When your provider’s office is closed, call Labor and Delivery: 206-598-4616