



## Common Discomforts in Pregnancy

**Abdominal cramping** - It is common to have cramping as the uterus grows. Pain can occur in the ligaments as the uterus enlarges. Braxton-Hicks are irregular uterine contractions and are common in the second and third trimester. Rx: Use a heating pad, increase fluid intake, rest and try Tylenol to help with discomfort. Call for severe pain, bleeding or regular contractions (more than 4 in one hour).

**Acne** - It is common for acne to occur during pregnancy due to hormonal changes. Keep your face clean and dry. Benzoyl peroxide, erythromycin and clindamycin can help with acne if prescribed by a dermatologist. Do not use Accutane or Tetracycline while pregnant.

**Allergies** - Hormonal changes can increase nasal sensitivity resulting in nasal stuffiness and allergies. Rx: Avoid allergens such as mold, dust and pets. Antihistamines such as Claritin or Zyrtec may help. Nasal sprays of saline may help. Prescription nasal steroids such as Flonase or Nasonex will treat allergies. A humidifier is often useful.

**Backache** - The increasing uterine size causes a shift in the center of gravity and posture. A hormone called relaxin causes the ligaments to soften and elongate. Rx: Practice good posture and keep core muscles strong. Bend at the knees instead of the waist when lifting. Wear low heels and avoid standing for long periods of time. A heating pad, ice or Tylenol may be helpful. Wear a support bra if needed. Try stretching, pelvic rocking, or wearing an external abdominal binder or "Belly band". Physical therapy or a massage may also help.

**Bleeding gums** - The high level of estrogen increases gum sensitivity. Rx: Practice good oral hygiene. Use a soft toothbrush & floss regularly. Try warm saline mouthwashes. Increase Vitamin C intake.

**Braxton-Hicks Contractions** - Irregular contractions of the uterus in preparation for labor. Braxton-Hicks do not usually signify labor is going to start. Rx: Rest on your left side and drink lots of fluid. Keep your bladder empty. Call if the contractions become regular (more than 4 in one hour) and intense and you are less than 34 weeks pregnant.

**Breast changes** - The increased hormone levels thicken the fat layer of the breast and stimulate the development of milk ducts causing breast pain. As the blood supply to the breasts increases, the blood vessels enlarge and bluish veins may appear on the breasts. The areola and nipple darken and Montgomery glands, the small pores around the areola, enlarge. Colostrum may leak during the last part of the pregnancy. Rx: Avoid caffeine, take Vitamin E 800 IU and wear a support bra.

**Carpal tunnel syndrome** - Fluid retention causes compression of the ulnar nerve in the wrist resulting in numbness and pain in the hands. Rx: Wear a wrist splint while sleeping. The

numbness usually disappears about 6-8 weeks postpartum. Remove rings from your fingers before they become too swollen.

**Constipation** - Progesterone produced in pregnancy relaxes smooth muscle in the colon and decreases peristalsis resulting in constipation. Iron and calcium supplementation, decreased exercise, stress and dehydration can contribute to constipation. Rx: Drink 8 glasses of water daily, eat prunes and a high fiber diet. Increase exercise and use a stool softener such as Colace or Benefiber. Use Miralax if necessary.

**Diarrhea** - Caused by hormonal changes affecting peristalsis. This frequently occurs during early labor. Rx: Drink liquids to avoid dehydration. Eat rice, bananas and toast. Avoid dairy products.

**Dizziness** - The enlarged uterus compresses the vena cava. Dizziness can also be caused by nausea, vomiting and blood sugar fluctuations. It may be caused by standing or sitting in the same position for long periods of time causing blood to accumulate in the lower extremities. Rx: Lay on your side (left or right) while sleeping. Eat frequent, small meals. Do not get up from sitting too quickly or take very hot showers. Move your legs while standing in place to increase blood circulation.

**Fatigue** - Caused by a fall in the metabolic rate, hormone level changes and sleep disturbances. Rx: Rest or take naps frequently. Avoid exercise before bed. Avoid caffeine.

**Flatulence** - Increased progesterone relaxes the anal sphincter. Rx: Avoid gas-producing foods, chewing gum or drinking carbonated drinks. Try Mylicon.

**Headaches** - Caused by stress, increased blood volume, low blood sugar, or hormone level changes. Rx: Rest, drink fluids, and try relaxation techniques or massage. Use Tylenol.

**Heartburn** - Increased progesterone relaxes the lower esophageal sphincter and decreases gastric motility. Production of stomach acids increases and the baby puts upward pressure on the stomach. Rx: Avoid acidic foods such as citrus fruits, tomatoes, red peppers and chocolate. Avoid spicy foods. Eat small, frequent meals rather than large meals. Do not lie down after eating. Try Maalox or Milk of Magnesia. Elevate the head of the bed when sleeping. Pepcid and Zantac decrease stomach production of acid. Tums will neutralize the stomach acid and Reglan (prescription) may increase gastrointestinal motility.

**Hemorrhoids** - Straining during bowel movements and constipation can cause veins in rectum to become inflamed and swollen. Increased blood volume and pressure due to additional weight from the pregnancy can cause varicose veins in the rectal area. Rx: Eat a high fiber diet, bran, whole grains and fruit. Try frequent sitz baths, sitting on a rubber ring, Preparation H, Tucks, or Anusol HC.

**Hip pain** - Commonly caused by ligaments become softer and loosen due to hormonal changes. Keeping active by walking and stretching. A heating pad and massage may help.

**Insomnia** - Caused by hormonal changes and discomfort due to physical changes in pregnancy. Rx: Try a warm bath, relaxation techniques, and a body pillow. Exercise daily, avoid caffeine, and reduce noise while sleeping. Experiment with comfortable sleeping positions. Benadryl causes fatigue and is commonly used to help with insomnia.

**Itching** - Caused by changing hormone levels. Rx: Increase fluid consumption. An Aveeno bath and moisturizing lotion may help. Use Benadryl cream, calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream.

**Leg cramps** - The uterus puts pressure on pelvic blood vessels causing decreased circulation to the lower extremity muscles. Rx: Stretch by straightening the affected leg. Flex the toes forward and away. Try leg elevation and massage. Calcium and magnesium supplements may help. A heating pad, hot water bottle or a warm bath may decrease symptoms.

**Mood swings** - Occur from constant fluctuation of hormone levels, fatigue and stress. Rx: Make time for yourself, rest, and exercise.

**Nasal congestion** - The hormone changes increase nasal mucosa sensitivity. Rapid breathing increases the dryness in the nasal passages. Rx: Use a humidifier, drink fluids, and try saline nasal sprays. (See nose bleeds)

**Nausea and vomiting** - This occurs from changing hormone levels, slowed peristalsis, stretching of the internal organs and the enlarging uterus putting pressure on the stomach. Rx: Avoid spicy or greasy foods. Eat small, frequent meals. Drink tea and liquids between meals. Keep crackers, popcorn, or toast at bedside. Try Vitamin B6 50-100mg with ½ a Unisom tablet. Acupressure wristbands and ginger may help. Several prescription medications are available if symptoms persist and interrupt daily life.

**Nose bleeds** - Caused by high estrogen levels, which increase nasal sensitivity. Rx: Sit with head tilted forward and pinch your nostrils for 10 - 15 minutes. Avoid overheated, dry air and excessive exertion. Blow your nose gently. Try sleeping with a room humidifier. Use Vaseline on the nasal passages or saline nasal spray to keep the nostrils moist. Try a nasal decongestant (pseudoephedrine) to shrink the swollen vessels.

**Numb spot on the abdomen** - Caused by the baby pushing on nerves to the abdomen. It is normal and no treatment is necessary.

**Pain with intercourse** - Occurs from pelvic and vaginal congestion, uterine enlargement and changing hormone levels. Rx: Try changing positions, more foreplay and using a lubricant.

**Palpitations** - Heart palpitations (pounding or rapid beats) are a normal response to the extra blood volume and are common in the first trimester. Rx - Take slow, deep breaths and reduce stress and anxiety.

**Round ligament pain** - The ligaments that support the enlarging uterus are stretching. Rx: Flex your knees to your abdomen. Try warm baths, a heating pad, exercise, or sleeping with a body pillow.

**Shortness of breath** - The enlarging uterus presses up against the diaphragm causing shortness of breath. Rx: Avoid restrictive clothing. Use pillows to elevate the back while sleeping.

**Skin changes** - Estrogen and progesterone hormones have melanocyte stimulating effects, causing a dark line on the abdomen (linea nigra) and a facial rash (chloasma). Rx: Avoid sun exposure and wear sunscreen. Be patient, it should resolve by 6 months after delivery.

**Stretch marks** - There is nothing that prevents stretch marks, although avoiding excessive weight gain in pregnancy may minimize them. The marks occur when the skin's normal elasticity does not accommodate the growing uterus. Stretch marks can occur on the abdomen, breast, thighs and upper arms. The marks usually fade after delivery. Rx: Moisturizing lotion may help with itching or discomfort.

**Swollen hands or feet** - Water retention in the extremities occurs from a pressure differential between the blood vessels and the lymphatic system. It occurs more often in the third trimester and can cause discomfort and carpal tunnel syndrome. Rx: Avoid restrictive clothes and long periods of standing. Wear support hose and try elevating the legs. Increase exercise and water intake.

**Urinary frequency** - Caused by the heavy weight of the uterus putting pressure on the bladder. Rx: Drink fewer fluids before bed. Wear easily removable clothing and do Kegel exercises to prevent urinary leakage.

**Urinary tract infection** - Due to relaxation of the sphincters in the perineum and slower peristalsis in the urinary system. Rx: Drink more fluids and consider cranberry juice or cranberry tablets. Use Vitamin C tablets. After urination, wipe from front to back. Urinate after intercourse. Call the office if you suspect an infection.

**Vaginal discharge** - Estrogen causes increased cervical mucous formation. Rx: Wear cotton underwear and pantliners. Call if odor, persistent itch, changes in color or consistency. Avoid pantyhose, girdles, and tight pants. Try a yeast medication if symptomatic of a yeast infection.

**Varicosities or varicose veins** - Caused by impaired circulation, pressure of the uterus on the circulatory system, and hormonal effects on veins. May be hereditary. Rx: Avoid restrictive clothing, long periods of standing, and crossing legs at the knees. Elevate legs and wear support hose. Continue exercising.

**Yeast infection** - Caused by a change in vaginal flora due to hormonal fluctuations and pH changes. Rx: Use good hygiene. Wear cotton underwear. Try yeast medication (available without a prescription).