



Normal Changes During Pregnancy

During pregnancy, women experience both physical and emotional changes. These changes are normal and to be expected. You may have already experienced some of these changes as your body has begun to adjust to your growing baby. While no two pregnancies are exactly alike, the following changes are common during the first three months of pregnancy (the first trimester). These changes vary in intensity from woman to woman.

Breast Changes. After you have been pregnant for only a short while, your breasts may tingle or feel tender, heavy, or sore. Your changing hormones are responsible for the discomfort in your breasts. By the time you are 6-8 weeks pregnant, your breasts will probably be larger and firmer. They may still feel tender. Your body is preparing for breast-feeding. Your milk glands are enlarging, fatty tissue is increasing, and veins may appear more prominent. For comfort, wear a supportive bra that fits you well. Some women feel better if they wear a bra while sleeping too.

Fatigue (Feeling Tired). Most women feel unusually tired during the early weeks or months of pregnancy. Fatigue occurs because your body is hard at work making many amazing changes. Your body is making extra blood to carry nutrients to your baby. Because of the extra blood, your heart is beating faster. Your kidneys are filtering your blood faster and your body consumes more oxygen now. Your body is also changing the way it distributes water, protein, fats, and other nutrients. In short, your changing hormones affect every part of your body—even your skin and hair. Stress also contributes to fatigue. Pregnancy can be stressful, even if you are very excited about being pregnant. A pregnant woman may be concerned about increased expenses, whether her baby will be healthy, and how she will adjust to a new baby. Some women also deal with job stresses or caring for their other children during pregnancy. The more stresses you must deal with, the more fatigued you may feel.

Here are two good ways to deal with fatigue:

- **Rest.** Listen to your body. Try to rest whenever you feel tired. Take naps when you can. Go to bed early when you need to. If you have other children, ask others to help with their care so you can get the rest you need.
- **Exercise.** Regular exercise will increase your energy level. Exercise also improves circulation, helps prevent constipation, and boosts your mood. Walking is a good way to exercise during pregnancy. If you did aerobic exercise (swimming, dancing, etc.) before you became pregnant you may be able to continue your exercise routine, if your doctor approves. Don't work out more than 30 minutes a day, however. If you didn't exercise before pregnancy, get your doctor's approval before you begin.

Morning Sickness (Nausea and Vomiting). About 70% of pregnant women have morning sickness. The hormone progesterone is thought to cause the nausea and/or vomiting that may occur during the first 12-16 weeks of pregnancy. Progesterone is produced by the placenta and affects the smooth muscles of the digestive tract. "Morning" sickness can occur at any time of the day. For some women, it lasts all day.

Here are some tips for coping with morning sickness:

- Nausea may be worse when your stomach is completely empty or completely full. To avoid either extreme, try eating 5 or 6 small meals a day.
- Every hour or two, have a small, high-protein snack like nuts or a peanut butter cracker.
- Avoid unpleasant smells.
- Ginger may help. Try ginger ale, gingersnap cookies, or ginger tea.
- Fatigue can worsen nausea. Get plenty of rest.
- Try wearing an acupuncture wrist band (used to prevent sea sickness). These are available at travel agencies or boating supply stores.

Frequent Urination. During pregnancy, hormonal changes increase the efficiency of your kidneys. At the same time, your uterus is growing larger and pressing on your bladder. For a while, this may result in the need to urinate more often. As the uterus continues to grow, by the fourth month it will no longer press on the bladder in the same way. You won't need to urinate as often. During the first trimester, however, urinate as often as you need to. It is important not to "hold" your urine and to be sure you completely empty your bladder each time. (It helps to lean forward as you urinate.) These measures will help protect you from urinary tract infections. Don't restrict your intake of fluids, except at night before you go to bed.

Mood Swings. Expect mood swings during the first trimester of your pregnancy. Like the physical changes listed above, emotional ups and downs are also caused by changing hormones. You may feel fine one moment, then feel irritable, tearful or depressed the next. Don't be too hard on yourself—remember that as your hormones levels stabilize your moods will too. Meanwhile, do things that will help you feel better. See a movie or nurture yourself with a nap or a bubble bath. Talk about your feelings with a good friend. If feelings of depression linger more than two weeks, call your doctor, your MedCost Prenatal Program nurse, or a therapist and tell them how you have been feeling.

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