

## Treating Common Symptoms While Pregnant

Many women have questions about how to safely treat common symptoms while pregnant. This is a list of the most common symptoms, with tips for treating them. If symptoms do not go away or worsen, please contact your care provider.

### Medicines

For a list of safe over-the-counter medicines you can use during pregnancy, ask for *Health Facts for You* #8219 called “Safe Non-Prescription Medicines During Pregnancy.”

### Back Pain

This may be caused by a change in your posture. Hormones may also cause the joints and ligaments in your pelvis to relax. These changes may cause backache and joint pain.

- Wear a supportive bra.
- Wear shoes with no or low heel with good arch support.
- Use a pregnancy support belt (may be able to be fit for a belt in your clinic) to help take the weight and pressure off back muscles.
- Use proper body mechanics when lifting or moving.
- Change your position often, at least every 30 minutes.
- If you need to stand for a long period of time, rest one foot on a stool or box to take the strain off of your back.
- Sit in chairs with good back support or place a small pillow behind your back.
- Put pillows between your legs when you sleep on your side.
- Take a warm tub bath for 30 minutes with or without Epsom salt.

- Use a heating pad on a lower setting for 10 minutes, a few times a day.
- Try pelvic rocking exercises or prenatal yoga.
- Start or maintain an exercise routine 3-4 times a week. There are classes and home-based programs geared for pregnant women. If starting out new, try walking or water exercises.
- Try a massage, a chiropractor or physical therapy.
- It is ok to use Tylenol® up to 1000 mg every 4 hours now and then. Do not take over 4000 mg in 24 hours.

### Headache

Causes include changes in hormones, increased blood flow, changes in posture, muscle tension, eyestrain, stress, and fatigue. To help prevent or relieve headaches:

- Spend 15 minutes twice a day using techniques to relax, meditate, breathe, or stretch.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Exercise and eat a healthy diet.
- Rest in a dark room with a cold cloth on your forehead.
- Avoid perfumes, cleaning products, or hair sprays.
- Try massage, acupuncture, or chiropractic treatments.
- You may take up to 1000 mg Tylenol® every 4 hours but do not take over 4000 mg in 24 hours.
- Drink a small cup of coffee, tea or soda with caffeine (less than 200 mg of caffeine per day).
- Take a magnesium supplement (400 mg per day).
- Take Vitamin B2 (Riboflavin, 400 mg per day).

## **Trouble Sleeping**

This is very common. It can be caused by body changes or needing to go to the bathroom at night. Changes in sleep patterns can also be caused by hormone changes, stress or anxiety. To improve sleep:

- Take a warm tub bath or shower before bed.
- Drink a decaf tea before bed such as Sleepy time®.
- Use techniques to relax such as progressive relaxation or meditation.
- Talk about any fears with partner, friend, counselor, or care provider.
- Use pillows to make yourself comfortable.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, dark, relaxing and at a comfortable temperature.
- Get daily exercise, but not within 4 hours of bedtime.
- Eat a bedtime snack such as cheese or other protein foods.
- Read or write in a journal if you cannot fall asleep.
- Avoid looking at or watching a screen (phone, tablet, television, etc.) just before bedtime. Remove electronic devices from the bedroom if needed.
- Stretch calf muscles before bedtime and/or take a calcium-magnesium supplement at bedtime to help lessen leg cramps.

## **Edema (Swelling)**

Swelling is the collection of fluid in tissues. It is common, as blood and body fluids increase to meet demands of the pregnancy. This is most common in your legs and hands towards the end of pregnancy. To help with swelling:

- Wear loose-fitting clothes and comfortable shoes.
- Elevate your legs for a period a time each day.

- Avoid sitting or standing for a long time.
- Drink lots of fluids, do not limit your fluid intake.
- Decrease sodium intake.
- Buy compression stockings (talk to your clinic about fit testing).
- Spend 20-30 minutes a day in a swimming pool or a warm tub with Epsom salts.

## **Heartburn**

Increased hormones cause the muscle at the top of the stomach to relax and allow stomach contents to back up (reflux) into the esophagus, causing heartburn. To help prevent and treat heartburn:

- Eat many small meals throughout the day instead of 3 large meals.
- Chew well and eat slowly.
- Avoid greasy or spicy foods, coffee, colas, tea, citrus or chocolate.
- Don't lie down for 2 hours after eating.
- Avoid drinking too much with your meals.
- Eat yogurt or drink warm milk.
- Sleep with more pillows to elevate your head if you have heartburn at night.
- Avoid tight fitting clothing that may put pressure on the stomach.

## **Constipation**

This is caused by the slowing of food moving through your stomach and pressure from the growing baby. Taking iron supplements and exercising less may add to this problem. To help with constipation:

- Drink plenty of water to keep urine light colored.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables and foods high in fiber such as bran muffins and other whole grains.

- Drink prune juice (½ to 1 cup each day) or eat prunes or other dried fruits.
- Drink water with lemon.
- Take a 200mg magnesium supplement 2 or 3 times a day (maximum of 600 mg per day).
- Try to have a routine for bowel habits. If you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, be sure to go.
- Exercise.
- Try bulk laxatives like Metamucil® or a stool softener such as Colace®.
- Try a laxative like Milk of Magnesia® or Miralax® (follow the directions on the bottle).

### **Hemorrhoids**

Hemorrhoids are swollen varicose veins of the rectum. They are caused by hormone changes and increased pressure from the pregnancy on the rectum. To prevent or treat hemorrhoids:

- Avoid constipation and straining to have a bowel movement.
- Increase fluids and eat a high-fiber diet.
- Avoid standing for long periods of time and sitting for a long time directly on hemorrhoid area.
- Take a warm tub bath (or sitz baths) 2 to 3 times a day for 10-20 minutes.
- Use witch hazel pads, such as Tucks®, after bowel movements.
- Avoid rubbing with toilet paper, just towel and dry off area gently.
- Apply Vaseline to painful area after drying to protect against irritation and to make it easier to pass stools.
- Gently ease (reduce) hemorrhoid into the rectum.
- Apply a skin numbing ointment with lidocaine such as Preparation H® and follow directions on the tube.

### **Colds, Flu, and Allergies**

When you notice the first symptoms of a cold or flu, try to:

- Increase fluids including warm fluids that can help relieve a sore throat.
- Inhale steam from boiling water. Be careful to avoid burns. You may also take a warm shower.
- Gargle with salt water to relieve sore throat: ½ teaspoon salt to 1 cup of warm water.
- Balance active and rest periods.
- Avoid spreading the virus to others with good hand washing.

### **When to Call**

- Severe headache:
  - Call if it doesn't improve after 24 of treatment.
  - Go to the emergency room if it feels like "the worst headache of your life."
- Sudden swelling in hands, face or in one leg.
- Change in vision with or without headache.
- Chest pain, shortness of breath or continuous coughing.

### **Who to Call**

20 S. Park St. Clinic\*  
20 S. Part St., Suite 307  
20 S. Part St., Suite 506  
Madison, WI 53715  
**(608) 287-2830**

Ob-Gyn Resident Physician Clinic  
20 S. Park St.  
Madison, WI 53715  
**(608) 287-2830**

Union Corners Clinic\*  
2402 Winnebago St.  
Madison, WI 53704  
**(608) 242-6840**

UW Health Junction Rd  
Medical Center\*  
451 Junction Rd.  
Madison, WI 53717  
**(608) 265-7601**

\*Location includes Midwifery Clinic

For a complete list of our providers and  
clinics, please visit [uwhealth.org](https://www.uwhealth.org).

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2021 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#5456.