

Managing Common Complaints in Pregnancy

What we know about the safety of medications and herbal supplements in pregnancy can change over the years, as more is learned, so that even some of the things that we think are safe later turn out to cause problems. The best policy is to take the fewest number of things and the lowest doses that are possible. This is particularly true in the first three months of pregnancy (first trimester), when the risks of birth defects are the highest. Still, being pregnant does not stop women from having other problems, and here are some suggestions for managing symptoms safely:

Allergies/Hayfever:

1. Salt water in the nose (1/2 tsp salt in 2/3 C water with a pinch of baking soda, 1 dropperful in each nostril three times a day)
2. Nasalcrom - 1 spray each nostril three to four times a day (this can take a couple days to work, and a week to see its full effect.)
3. Antihistamines: Claritin (loratidine) 10 mg per day or zyrtec 10 mg per day orally
4. Decongestants: may be used after first trimester, but with caution, since they constrict blood vessels. Nasal sprays such as Afrin can be used after first trimester for 1-2 days at a time only (since they are very habit-forming if used longer), and Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) can be taken orally 30 – 60 mg every 6-8 hours if you are desperate or waiting for other things to work.

Nausea/Vomiting:

Eat small frequent meals (try snacking even before you get out of bed in the morning), try eating foods chilled, stay away from cooking odors, and so on. If you are still very nauseated, try:

1. Vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine) 100 mg per day, and add Unisom 10 mg every 6 hours if not working
2. Ginger 500 mg 2-4x per day (some authors say maximum 1000 mg per day)
3. Consider Emetrol syrup, 1-2 Tblsp every 15 min. for up to 5 doses, with no/minimal other fluids.

If this is severe for you, ask for our handout specifically on nausea. If you are vomiting and getting dehydrated (feeling dizzy or lightheaded, peeing very little), please call or come in – you may need medical treatment.

Heartburn:

Eat small, frequent meals and avoid drinking a lot of fluids with meals or eating within 2 hours of lying down. Avoid greasy foods. Some people find taking papaya enzymes with meals decreases their heartburn. If not:

1. Calcium carbonate (Tums) 500 mg as needed, up to 4 per day (take with meals)
2. Digestive enzymes with meals.
3. Ranitidine (Zantac) 150 mg twice a day

Constipation:

Eat lots of fruits and veggies and drink plenty of water. Going for regular walks also helps.

1. Fiber supplements such as psyllium (Metamucil) or Benefiber can help
2. Stool softeners (such as docusate 100 mg twice a day)
3. *Magnesium oxide – start with 2 pills a day and gradually increase until your bowels are moving easily, cut back if you develop diarrhea.*this often works the best

Diarrhea:

Drink plenty of salty fluids, limit dairy products, and see a doctor if you are having fever or blood in your stool. If not, try a fiber supplement like psyllium, which will often bind together loose stools. Other things you can use:

1. Kaopectate – 1-2 tabs every ½ - 1 hour, up to maximum 8 doses per day
2. Loperamide (Imodium) 2 mg, 1-2 tabs to start and then one every couple hours as needed, up to a maximum of 8 pills per day.

AVOID Pepto-Bismol.

Frequent urination:

The uterus is pressing on the bladder. Some women will limit fluids in the evening so they can sleep better. Limit caffeine as well. Talk to your provider if you have burning when urinating or pain in your back, near the waist.

Vaginal discharge:

It is normal for discharge to increase with the increased hormones of pregnancy. Wear cotton underwear, avoid pantyhose and tight pants. Do not use perfumed soap or feminine hygiene sprays or powders. Talk to your provider if you have itching or burning or a strong fishy odor.

Pain:

Acetaminophen(Tylenol) is considered safe in pregnancy.

DO NOT take aspirin, ibuprofen(motrin), naprosyn(aleve, nuprin) or other anti-inflammatory medications.

Headaches:

See pain relievers as above. To prevent headaches in early pregnancy:

1. Drink plenty of fluids and take in extra salt. One helpful remedy is to drink a cup of soup morning and night.
2. Take magnesium citrate, or magnesium lactate, glycinate or other forms (but NOT magnesium oxide) regularly – gradually increase the dose to as much as you can tolerate without diarrhea.

If you get headaches in late pregnancy, this could be a sign of a serious problem; talk to your provider.

Dizziness:

Get up slowly when you have been lying down or squatting. Eat regular meals, drink plenty of water, and if this is still severe, consider eating a little more salt or drinking a cup of soup a couple times a day. Sometimes, support stockings or tights can help by decreasing blood pooling in your ankles.

Moodiness:

It is common to be moody with the hormone changes of pregnancy as well as the psychological adjustment to pregnancy. Talk with someone supportive and practice relaxation. Take fish oil. If this is severe or interfering with your relationships, please talk to us about it.

It is also common to have bad dreams – this is a way of working through subconscious fears and does not predict that bad things will happen in reality.

Leg cramps:

Stretch your calves before bed – stand with your toes on the edge of a stair and let your heels drop to let your body weight stretch the muscles. Extra calcium and extra magnesium can also help with these cramps.

Varicose veins and leg swelling:

Foods with bioflavonoids (citrus, berries, onions) strengthen vein walls. Elevate your legs when possible and wear support stockings. Drink plenty of water, and exercise regularly (exercise in water is the best for this.) Limiting salt is not particularly helpful.

Sore breasts:

Wear a good and supportive bra.

Fatigue:

Rest frequently, and eat frequently. Regular exercise helps as well.

Later in pregnancy, many women have trouble sleeping – if that happens to you, experiment with pillows under your belly and between your legs to make yourself more comfortable, try salt water in your nose before bed and breathe right strips to help with snoring, and talk to your provider about herbs like valerian or medications to help with insomnia.

Low back pain:

Maintain good posture. Move around frequently. When you have to stand for a long time, try elevating one foot on a low step to keep the pelvis tilted forward. When sitting or reclining, try to keep your knees higher than your hips (elevate with a pillow under the knees,) and when lying down on your side, try a pillow between the knees and possibly another under the belly.