

# Nausea in Pregnancy

*Only about 15% of women don't suffer from nausea at some time during their pregnancy. More than half will have vomiting. Since each woman is different and each pregnancy is different, the severity will vary.*

## **What causes nausea?**

No one knows exactly what the cause is. It is believed that it's a combination of the many physical changes taking place in the body, especially the higher levels of hormones during early pregnancy.

## **How long will it last?**

Nausea usually starts between 5 and 6 weeks of pregnancy. Although common in the morning, "morning sickness" can actually last all day, or even be worse in the evening. For 80% of sufferers, nausea gradually lessens, with more and more nausea-free days, until it ceases completely around the 12<sup>th</sup> week – although physical or emotional stresses can cause temporary relapses. The other 20% of sufferers will have nausea for a longer period of time, some even until the end of pregnancy.

## **Is it dangerous to me or my baby?**

Nausea, especially if severe, can be emotionally draining. Many women find that it interferes with usual daily activities, making it necessary to find ways to cope. But the large majority of the time nausea isn't physically harmful to mom or baby. If you were healthy before you started pregnancy, your body and your baby will draw on your nutritional reserves. There is even a theory that the minimal nutrition of the first trimester during the stage when the placenta is growing, essentially tricks the body to grow a larger, more efficient placenta.

## **What if I can't keep anything down?**

About 1% of women suffer from excessive vomiting in pregnancy, a condition called "hyperemesis gravidarum". In such cases, the lack of food, fluids and nutrients may be harmful to their health and the well-being of their baby, if left untreated. Treatment usually includes IV fluids, as dehydration makes the condition worse, which in turn increases the amount of nausea, vomiting and fluid loss.

# Nausea Survival Strategies

## Low blood sugar

- Having low blood sugar can cause or worsen nausea, so eat small, frequent meals.
- Carry snacks such as raw almonds (which also minimize heartburn).
- When you first wake up, eat a snack, and then rest for 15 minutes before getting out of bed.
- Keep a few crackers or bowl of nuts in the bathroom, so you can keep your blood sugar up by snacking during those middle of the night trips.
- Until your nausea decreases, eat according to your cravings – better to eat something, than nothing at all

## Carbs & Proteins

- Eat protein for sustained energy. Try some just before bed to avoid morning nausea.
- Go for complex carbs, as refined carbs can quickly cause a blood sugar low.
- Some women find carbs (crackers, dry toast, popcorn, granola bars) more relieving, other prefer proteins (nuts, cheese,

## Flavors, Smells, Textures

- Women may crave certain flavors: salty, sweet, sour. Find what works for you.
- Smelling citrus fruit – oranges and lemons – can help. Eating citrus also helps your body to efficiently absorb iron.
- Keeping the saliva flowing by sucking on something sour can help, but don't do this on an empty stomach
- Avoid spicy, fatty and fried foods
- Try eating food cold, as it may not smell as strong as when hot. Try popsicles.
- Minimize cooking smells.
- The smells of coffee and red meat are often triggers.

## Fluids

- Don't let dehydration make your nausea worse: drink at least 2 litres a day.

- Drinks that lessen nausea count towards your 2 litres: ginger tea, ginger ale, anything bubbly like sparkling water or seltzer
- Caffeine counts against your 2 litres, as it causes more dehydration – drink an extra cup of water for every cup of caffeine or ounce of chocolate

## Indigestion

- Avoid letting your stomach to be fully empty
- Don't take supplements on an empty stomach.
- Try digestive teas if indigestion, constipation or diarrhea is associated with your nausea: fennel, mint, chamomile, etc.
- Take digestive enzymes at mealtime, such as papain and bromelain.
- Try activated charcoal for a "sour" stomach, 2 capsules when nauseous, up to twice a day.

## Rest

- Being tired makes nausea worse. In the first trimester it's normal to need more sleep, so go to bed early.
- Take naps whenever you can.

## Stress

- Emotional and physical stress can make nausea worse. You may need to take some time from work, or adjust your work hours.
- Avoid warm places as feeling hot can add to nausea.
- Many complementary therapies can help with nausea by decreasing physical stress: see your chiropractor, have a massage.
- Try finding relief through counseling and talking with others, to eliminate any psychological component

## Exercise

- CO<sub>2</sub> buildup in the blood contributes to nausea, but can be reduced with cardiovascular activity like walking and swimming
- Exercise in fresh air seems to be especially helpful.

## Vitamins

- Try 25mg of Vitamin B6, up to 6 per day.
- The iron in daily vitamins can make nausea worse. Take vitamins with food or just before bed. If this doesn't help, then decrease or stop taking daily vitamins until your nausea is gone. Vitamins are supposed to fill the nutrient gaps in your diet – if you eat worse because of increased nausea, then they are not helping. Continue to take folic acid alone on a daily basis.

## Ginger

- Take 250 mg capsules up to four times a day, or 5-6 cups of fluid per day. Try ginger ale, ginger beer, ginger tea, candied ginger or ginger-lemonade.

## Aromatherapy

- Many essential oils are off-limits in pregnancy. However, smelling lavender and/or citrus essential oils may help. Try putting some in a bath.
- Acupuncture
- Research has been shown acupuncture to be effective. Look for a practitioner with experience in treating pregnant women.
- Try SeaBands, available at drugstores, designed to offset motion sickness by stimulating acupressure points in the wrist.

## Medications

- Diclectin is a medication considered safe for treating nausea in pregnancy. It is a combination of Vitamin B6 and an antihistamine. It can have uncomfortable side effects such as dry mouth or sleepiness, so it's usually only for serious nausea. Ask your midwife for more info and/or a prescription.