

Pregnancy

Pregnancy is very special time. You'll want to think about taking good care of yourself and getting your baby's life off to a healthy start. Your oral health is an important part of your overall health, and good oral health habits not only help prevent oral problems during pregnancy, they also affect the health of your unborn child.



What is pregnancy?

Pregnancy means that a baby is growing inside of your uterus (womb). A normal pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks from your last menstrual period. Caregivers divide pregnancy into three blocks of time called trimesters. The first trimester lasts from your last menstrual period through your 13th week of pregnancy. The second trimester lasts from the 14th week of your pregnancy through your 26th week. The third trimester lasts from your 27th week of pregnancy until your baby is born. Your caregiver can estimate (guess) when you may have your baby. This can be done using the start (first day) of your last menstrual period. It can also be done if you know the date that you became pregnant. This estimate is called your due date. Your due date may change later in your pregnancy, based on certain tests. You may give birth to your baby any time from two weeks before your due date, to two weeks after your due date.

What is prenatal care?

- Prenatal care is the regular visits that you have with your health caregiver throughout your pregnancy. It is important to start prenatal care as early in your pregnancy as possible. Prenatal care can help prevent problems during pregnancy and childbirth. It can also help find certain problems early, so they can be treated. Your caregiver may want to see you every month or so during your early months of pregnancy. Your caregiver will need to see you more often as you get close to your due date. If you have problems, such as diabetes or problems with your pregnancy, you may need more frequent prenatal visits.
- At each visit, you will be weighed and have your blood pressure taken. Your urine may be tested and your baby's growth checked. Your caregiver may listen to your baby's heartbeat. Your caregiver will talk to you about ways to keep yourself and your baby as healthy as possible. Other things that may be done during a prenatal visit include the following.
 - **Pelvic exam:** During a pelvic exam, your caregiver checks your female organs for certain problems. Your caregiver can also tell a lot about your pregnancy during a pelvic exam. For example, the size and shape of your uterus is checked to help see how your baby is growing.
 - **Blood tests:** Blood tests may be done to check many things about your health. For example, your caregiver may check for gestational diabetes. Gestational diabetes is a medical problem during pregnancy that causes your blood sugar to be too high. Without treatment, diabetes may cause health problems for you and your baby. Your blood is also checked for

anemia (low iron level). The following are blood tests that may be done during pregnancy:

- ❖ **Blood type and Rh factor:** Your blood type (A, B, or O) is checked and is also tested for its Rh factor. An Rh factor describes a type of protein you have in your blood. Most people have the Rh factor so they are called "Rh positive". People who do not have the Rh factor are called "Rh negative". You and your baby have separate blood systems. However, a small amount of your baby's blood can get into your bloodstream. If you are Rh negative and your baby is Rh positive, this may cause problems if you are not treated. Your Rh factor does not change. If you are Rh negative, it may affect any pregnancy you have. Ask your caregiver for more information about Rh problems and pregnancy if you are Rh negative.
- ❖ **Maternal serum alpha-fetoprotein (MSAFP) test:** The MSAFP test looks for a protein in your blood called alpha-fetoprotein, or AFP. This test may help find problems with your baby early, such as certain birth defects of the spinal cord.
- ❖ **Triple test:** This is a blood test that looks for MSAFP, HCG, and estriol. HCG (human chorionic gonadotrophin) is the hormone that makes your pregnancy test positive. Estriol is the estrogen hormone of pregnancy. The triple test may also help find certain problems with your baby.
- **Fetal ultrasound:** This simple test uses sound waves to show pictures of your baby (fetus) inside your uterus. Some jelly-like lotion is placed on your abdomen. A small handle is gently moved through the lotion and across the skin on your abdomen (belly). You can see pictures of your baby on a TV-like screen. Caregivers can learn the age of your baby and see how fast he is growing. The movement, heart rate, and position of your baby can be seen. Caregivers can see your placenta, and can tell if you have more than one baby.
- **Other tests:** There are many other tests that may be done to check for problems with you or your baby while you are pregnant. For example, certain tests can check for genetic (inherited) problems or nervous system problems that your baby may have. Other tests, such as a contraction stress test, can be done later in pregnancy to see how your baby is doing. Ask your doctor for more information about any other tests you may need.

What else can I do to keep my baby and me healthy during my pregnancy?

- **Eat a healthy diet:** When you are going to have a baby, eating healthy is very important. During pregnancy, you need extra protein, vitamins, minerals, water, and calories. You need these to help you have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. Eating healthy foods may also help you feel better and have more energy. It is important to eat a variety of foods every day. Healthy foods include fruits, vegetables, breads, dairy products, and protein such as meat and beans. Dairy products include milk, yogurt, and cheese. Avoid raw or undercooked meat and fish. Ask your caregiver for more information about a nutrition program that is right for you.

- **Take prenatal vitamins as directed:** Even with a healthy diet, you may not get the amount of vitamins and minerals that your baby needs. Prenatal vitamins can help you get the right amount of vitamins and minerals. Prenatal vitamins may also decrease the risk of certain birth defects. Your caregiver will suggest the right kind and amount of prenatal vitamin for you. Take your prenatal vitamin every day. Do not skip days because you think your diet is good enough. You should still eat a healthy diet even if you take a prenatal vitamin.
- **Weight gain:** Talk to your caregiver about how much weight you should gain each month. Too much or too little weight gain can be unhealthy for you and your baby.
- **Drink plenty of liquids:** Drink at least eight (8-ounce) cups of healthy liquids each day. Healthy liquids include milk, water, or juice. Avoid liquids that have caffeine in them such as coffee, tea, and soda pop. **Do not drink liquids that contain alcohol.** There is no known "safe" amount of alcohol that you can drink while pregnant. You should not drink beer, wine, liquor (like whiskey or gin), or any other mixed drinks. Alcohol can cause problems during your pregnancy such as a miscarriage (losing your baby). It can cause your baby to be born too small and have severe, lifelong learning problems.
- **Do not smoke:** You should not smoke cigarettes or anything else during pregnancy. Your baby may weigh less at birth if you smoke during pregnancy. Low birth weight can be dangerous for your baby. Smoking increases the chance of your baby being born too early or your baby not growing well. Second-hand smoke (being around someone else who is smoking frequently) is dangerous as well. Talk to your caregiver if you are having trouble quitting smoking.
- **Do not take medicines without your caregiver's OK:** Many medicines may cause permanent harm to your baby if you take them when you are pregnant. Do not take any medicines, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, herbs, or food supplements without first taking to your caregiver. **Never** use illegal or "street" drugs (such as marijuana or cocaine) while you are pregnant or breast feeding. Talk to your caregiver if you are having trouble quitting street drugs.
- **Exercise:** Regular exercise during pregnancy is important. Talk with your caregiver about your exercise program. Exercising will help you feel better and keep you in good physical shape. Your labor and delivery could be easier if you exercise. Start exercising slowly if you were not active before pregnancy. Walking and swimming are great choices. Do not do any exercise that could put you or your baby at risk for injury, like mountain climbing, surfing, or racquetball. Your exercise routine may need to change as your pregnancy progresses. Proper body mechanics (how you stand, sit, and lie) are also important to help prevent back pain and other problems.

What body changes should I expect during my pregnancy?

- **Back pain:** You will likely have back pain as your baby grows. Squatting down by bending your knees is better than bending down from your waist. Try to have good posture by standing straight. Wear shoes with good support. Get plenty of rest and sleep on a firm mattress. Use pillows for support when you lie on your side. Avoid lying flat on your back because the weight of your baby may cause blood flow and back pain problems. Ice or heat packs to your back and back rubs can help your discomfort. Ask your caregiver to show you how to do pelvic tilt exercises to help decrease your back pain.

- **Bleeding gums:** It is normal for your gums to bleed a little because of the increased blood in your body during pregnancy. Continue brushing and flossing to keep your gums and teeth healthy. Use a soft toothbrush. It is OK to see your dentist during pregnancy, but make sure you tell him you are pregnant. Avoid having x-rays taken, if possible, until after your baby is born.

- **Breast changes:**
 - Your breasts will get larger, heavier, and they may be painful. This can cause you to be uncomfortable. A good support bra may help you feel better. A support bra helps prevent the breakdown of the elastic tissue in the breast. You may need to wear a support bra 24 hours a day, even while sleeping. If you are planning to breast feed your baby, buy nursing bras after you give birth. Your breasts may change in size after your milk comes in. The size of your breasts does not affect your ability to breast feed.

 - It is normal for a thin, yellowish fluid called colostrum to come out of your nipples. This can happen as early as the 10th week of pregnancy. This colostrum changes to milk about three days after you have your baby. You may want to put pads inside your bra to soak up this fluid and help keep your nipples dry. If you have inverted nipples, ask caregivers if you need nipple cups to help make it easier to breast feed.

 - Your nipples may be sore. Wash them with water only. Do not use soap because it can dry out your nipples. You may want to put some lanolin on them to help the soreness. Do not use petroleum jelly.

- **Constipation:** Pregnancy can cause constipation, which is when you have hard, dry stools which are difficult to pass, less often than usual. Do not strain to try and push the BM out if it is too hard. Straining can cause hemorrhoids. Walking is the best way to decrease problems with constipation. Drinking more water can help too. Eat foods high in fiber to make it easier to have a BM. Good examples are high fiber cereals, beans, fruits, vegetables, and whole grain breads. Prune juice may help make the BM softer. Your caregiver may also suggest fiber medicine to help make your BMs softer and more regular. Talk to your caregiver before using a stool softener or a laxative. Do not use mineral oil or enemas.

- **Hemorrhoids:** Hemorrhoids are enlarged veins in the rectal area. They may cause pain, itching, and sometimes bright red bleeding from your bottom. Hemorrhoids are more common in pregnancy because your growing uterus increases pressure in the blood vessels around your bottom. To help decrease your chance of hemorrhoids, do not strain to have a BM. Eating high fiber foods, drinking liquids, and exercising will help keep your BMs soft and easier to pass. If you have hemorrhoids, soaking in a tub of warm water can ease your discomfort. Ask your caregiver before using medicine to treat your hemorrhoids. Tell your caregiver if you have bleeding from your hemorrhoids.

- **Heartburn:** Heartburn (a burning discomfort in your chest) is more common during pregnancy. This is because your growing abdomen pushes acid from your stomach up into your esophagus (food pipe). Eating small, frequent meals rather than three large meals can help. Avoid greasy or spicy foods. Drinking liquids between meals instead of with meals may be helpful. Sit upright for at least three hours after eating. Ask your caregiver about which antacids are OK to take to help your heartburn during pregnancy.

- **Leg cramps:** Many things may cause leg cramps during pregnancy. You may have them due to being tired, or not eating enough foods high in calcium. As your baby grows and puts pressure on your lower body, your legs may not get enough blood. Try to rest often, putting your feet up so that your legs rest higher than your heart. During a leg cramp, straighten your leg and flex your toes toward your head. Standing flat on your feet may also help ease leg cramps.
- **Moodiness:** Your moods may quickly change from joy to sadness or mild depression. These changes are normal and are caused by your body's hormones. Talk to your caregiver if you feel very sad or if you think about harming yourself or your baby.
- **Morning sickness:** Nausea and vomiting (throwing up) during pregnancy is often called morning sickness, but it may happen any time of day. There are some steps you can take that may help morning sickness. Avoid strong odors that may make you nauseated (sick to your stomach). Eat a few crackers or a piece of dry toast before getting out of bed in the morning. Keep crackers by the bed, so that you do not have to get out of bed with an empty stomach. Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day. Drink liquids between meals, instead of drinking them with meals. Avoid greasy or spicy food. Talk to your caregiver if the nausea and vomiting lasts past the first three months of pregnancy. Call your caregiver if you cannot keep liquids down, or if you are losing weight. Do **not** take medicine for nausea or vomiting without your caregiver's OK.
- **Round ligament pain:** Your uterus is held in place in your lower abdomen by bands of tissue called round ligaments. As your uterus grows during pregnancy, these ligaments are stretched. This may cause abdominal pain on one or both sides. Sudden movements may trigger this pain, or cause it to get worse. Lying on your sore side may help the pain. Avoid sudden position changes.
- **Skin changes and stretch marks:** You may have red marks, called stretch marks, on your skin. There is nothing that you can do to keep from getting stretch marks, and they will fade after pregnancy. Your skin may be dry and itchy. Lotion will help your skin feel smoother and softer. The skin on your face may darken. You may help decrease this by using a sunscreen, or staying out of the sun. The skin around your nipples and in areas of your abdomen below your belly button may become darker. Most of the time, this skin will return to its normal color after the baby is born.
- **Swelling:** Your fingers, feet, and ankles may swell later in pregnancy. Lying down two or three times a day may decrease the swelling. Raising your feet and legs so they are above your heart for 10 or 15 minutes can also help. Lying on your left side while sleeping helps the blood from your legs flow back to your heart. Decreasing the amount of salt in your diet may also decrease swelling. Elastic support hose may help your legs feel better and decrease swelling. Talk to your caregiver if the swelling increases or you have concerns.
- **Tiredness:** You may need more sleep to feel your best. If possible, take a nap during the day. If you cannot do this, at least take a few 10 to 15 minute-long rest breaks. Being well rested will help you deal with the physical and emotional changes of pregnancy. If you have trouble sleeping, try taking a warm shower or drink a cup of warm milk before bed.
- **Urination:** You will urinate more often early in pregnancy, and again later in pregnancy as your abdomen gets bigger. You could also pass urine by accident when you cough, sneeze, or move. Ask caregivers about doing kegel exercises to strengthen the muscle around your vagina and urethra (urine tube). Doing kegel

exercises may help decrease urine leakage both before and after your baby is born.

- **Urinary tract infections (UTIs):** UTIs are more common during pregnancy. Having a UTI can cause problems with your pregnancy, so it is important to get treatment early. Since UTIs sometimes have no symptoms, your caregiver will test your urine at each prenatal visit. To decrease your chance of having a UTI, wipe from front to back (towards your bottom) after urinating or having a BM. Wash between your legs with soap and warm water every day. Urinate as soon as you feel the need to. Call your caregiver right away if you have burning or pain when you urinate, trouble urinating, or bloody urine.
- **Vaginal discharge:** You may have thicker and heavier vaginal discharge while you are pregnant. If your vaginal discharge becomes yellow, green, curdy white, or has a bad smell. These may be signs of infection. Talk to your caregiver if you have vaginal burning or itching, pain, or are concerned about your discharge. Do not douche unless your caregiver tells you to do so to treat an infection.
- **Varicose veins:** Varicose veins are swollen blood vessels that usually happen in your legs and lower body. Your growing baby can increase pressure in your lower blood vessels. Standing for long periods of time can make this increased pressure even worse. This can cause varicose veins. If you have varicose veins in your legs, you should rest often with your legs raised higher than your heart. Wearing support panty hose may help your legs feel better. If you have varicose veins in your genital area (between your legs), rest often with a small pillow under your bottom. Avoid constipation, because straining to have a BM can make your varicose veins worse. Your varicose veins will likely improve after you have your baby.

Other pregnancy tips:

- **Clothing:** Wear comfortable, loose fitting, and lightweight clothing. Wearing flat or low-heeled shoes may help you keep your balance and prevent falls. Low shoes may help decrease back pain also. Avoid wearing knee-high or thigh-high stockings, or anything too tight like a regular girdle. These things can change the way blood circulates (moves) in your legs, causing swelling and varicose veins. Wearing support hose may decrease swelling. Put the hose on before getting out of bed in the morning. Maternity girdles that are made to support your pregnant abdomen but are loose fitting in front can be worn.
- **Hot tubs and saunas:** Do not use a hot tub or sauna while you are pregnant, especially during your first trimester. Hot tubs and saunas may cause your baby's temperature to increase. Birth defects may occur if your baby's temperature goes up too high.
- **Sexual intercourse (sex):** You can have sex until your labor starts, unless there are problems with your pregnancy. Ask your caregiver about ways and positions to have sex to adjust for your growing abdomen. Always use condoms during sex if you are at risk for getting a sexually transmitted disease (STD). STDs can be dangerous for you and your baby. Do not have sex if you are bleeding from the vagina, or having pain in your abdomen or vagina. Your caregiver may also tell you not to have sex if you have a history of preterm (early) labor. Ask your caregiver for more information about having sex during your pregnancy.
- **Travel:** The most comfortable time to travel is during the second trimester (fourth to sixth months). Your morning sickness should be gone, and you may

have more energy during this time. Ask your caregiver for advice before taking a trip. Some common travel tips include the following.

- **By car:** Wear your seat belt every time you drive or ride in a vehicle. Always wear both the lap belt and the shoulder harness, and wear them as snug as is comfortable. Wear the shoulder harness above your belly and below your neck. Fasten the lap belt under your belly and across your upper leg. Dress comfortably when going on long trips. Stop every hour to get out of the car and walk around. This will help blood flow to your legs.
 - **By airplane:** Your caregiver may tell you to avoid flying during the first trimester, due to possible radiation exposure. When flying, ask for an aisle seat. This will make it easier for you to get to the bathroom, and to walk around at least every hour. Talk to your caregiver about flying during the last several weeks of your pregnancy. Some airlines may require a letter from your caregiver saying it is OK for you to fly. Other airlines may not let you fly, even with your caregiver's OK. Call ahead to find out the policy of your airline.
 - **Other travel tips:** You may need to avoid traveling to high altitudes, especially later in your pregnancy. Avoid traveling to areas where medical care is poor and water is untreated. Talk to your doctor before traveling outside of the country while pregnant. Do **not** take medicines, including motion sickness medicine, unless your caregiver says it is OK.
- **Toxoplasmosis:** Toxoplasmosis is an infection that can be dangerous for pregnant women. You can get toxoplasmosis from eating raw meat or being around infected cat feces (BMs). It can cause birth defects, miscarriages, and other pregnancy problems. If you get toxoplasmosis, caregivers may treat it with medicine. The best thing you can do is to avoid getting toxoplasmosis in the first place. The following are some ways to avoid toxoplasmosis.
 - Wash your hands after touching raw meat, and make sure the meat is well cooked before eating it. Avoid eating raw eggs and unpasteurized milk.
 - Someone else should clean your cat's litter box while you are pregnant. If you must change the litter yourself, wear latex or vinyl gloves and wash your hands immediately afterwards. Do not garden in soil that cats use as a bathroom. Ask your doctor for more information about toxoplasmosis.
 - **Working:** Most pregnant women do not need to stop working. Talk to your caregiver if you work around poisonous or harmful things, or work in a dangerous job. Talk to your caregiver if your job has a lot of physical labor, or if you need to stand up a lot at work.