

Even though you may not have noticed, the moment you became pregnant your body started changing in miraculous ways. These changes are preparing your body to be the perfect place for your baby to develop and grow until that beautiful day when you finally meet face-to-face. This brochure is a general overview of some of the changes you can expect to happen to your body during your pregnancy.

Breasts

Have you noticed that your breasts are tender and getting bigger? Perhaps this was one of the signs that made you suspect you were pregnant. These changes are obvious. But there are other changes going on in your breasts as they prepare for breastfeeding. By six to eight weeks of pregnancy, your breasts will be noticeably larger. The fat layer of your breasts is thickening and the number of milk glands is increasing. Your breasts will continue to grow in size and weight throughout the first trimester. Your breasts will feel firm and tender.

As they become larger, you will notice that the veins on your breasts will look darker and closer to the surface. This is because the blood supply increases to fuel the growth. You might also notice that your nipples and the darker skin around them called the areolas are getting darker and more bumpy. Your nipples may also stick out more now. This helps your baby firmly latch on to your breasts. At about 12 to 14 weeks of pregnancy, your breasts may begin producing colostrum, the fluid that will feed your baby and protect it for the first few days before your milk comes in. The colostrum will probably be thick and yellow in the beginning and, toward the end of pregnancy, it will become pale and nearly clear.

Nausea and Vomiting

One of the most common complaints from pregnant women is “morning sickness.” Women feel nauseous and sometimes vomit the first thing in the morning when the stomach is empty. While “morning sickness” usually lasts for a short time during the day, some women feel nauseous for longer periods of time and some women into late pregnancy. Morning sickness is caused by changes in hormones. There are some things you can do that may help you feel more comfortable: Eat saltine crackers, pretzels, or dry toast before getting out of bed and wait 15 minutes before getting out of bed. Eat smaller but more frequent meals. Avoid spicy, greasy, and acidic foods. Eating bland foods is best. If nausea or vomiting becomes severe, notify your doctor. Always check with your doctor before you take any medication or herbal remedy.

Feeling Tired

During the first three months, you may feel exhausted all of the time, no matter how much you sleep. This will pass. But while you are feeling this way, take a nap if at all possible. Eating well and exercising can help you get through this time in your pregnancy.

Constipation and Hemorrhoids

At least half of all pregnant women have problems with constipation. One of the reasons for this may be the changes in hormones that slow the movement of food through the digestive tract. During the last part of the pregnancy, pressure on your rectum from your uterus may add to the problem. Pregnant women who are constipated often also have hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in the rectum. Some suggestions that may help: Drink plenty of fluids, at least eight glasses each day. Include fruit juices, such as prune juice. Eat high-fiber food, like raw fruits and vegetables and bran cereals. Exercise daily.

Cramps and Groin or Pelvic Pain

In the last trimester, you may find that you have leg cramps. Stretching your legs before going to bed can help relieve cramps. If you get a cramp, flex your toes toward your knee to stretch the muscle and relieve the cramp. As the uterus grows, the round ligaments are pulled and stretched. Stretching ligaments can cause a sharp pain in your abdomen, usually on the side, or a dull ache. The pains are most common between 18 and 24 weeks. When you feel a pain, bend toward it to relieve it.

Frequent Urination

This is caused by pressure from the growing uterus on the bladder, which holds the urine. As your uterus grows and rises higher into your abdomen, the symptoms usually disappear. However, they will probably recur toward the end of your third trimester when the baby drops into the pelvis and again presses against the bladder. You may find that you leak urine when you sneeze or cough.

Heartburn

Heartburn is a sharp burning pain that is first felt in the stomach and then rises up into the throat. When you are pregnant, your body produces a hormone to relax your muscles. This allows your pelvic bones to spread. It also slows digestion and relaxes the muscle that keeps the digested food and acids in your stomach, stopping it from re-entering the esophagus. This is made worse by the uterus pressing up against your stomach.

To help relieve heartburn, try the following: Eat five or six small meals a day instead of two or three large ones. Don't eat foods that cause gas like beans, cabbage, raw broccoli, etc. Also stay away from greasy and spicy foods. Eat at least an hour before lying down.

Numbness and Tingling

As the uterus grows, it rests on certain nerves, which can result in numbness and tingling in the legs, the toes and sometimes the arms. If you feel a sharp pain in your butt that extends down your leg, perhaps even to your toes, then the sciatic nerve is involved. This is usually not serious and will go away after the baby is born.

Skin Changes

When you are pregnant, you produce hormones that affect certain areas of your skin. You may get brownish, uneven blotches around your eyes, above your eyes and cheekbones, or over your upper lip. These marks usually disappear or fade after pregnancy when hormone levels return to normal. Many women notice a dark line running from the top to the bottom of the abdomen. Stretch marks are sometimes the most distressing thing about pregnancy, especially for teenagers. However, they are a normal part of pregnancy. Their severity depends on the elasticity of your skin. They occur on the abdomen and sometimes on the breasts, thighs, and butt. No cream, including cocoa butter, will help prevent stretch marks. It is your skin's ability to stretch, not how soft it is, that affects the stretch marks. While most stretch marks fade and turn silver on their own, there are some prescription creams that can help diminish stretch marks after pregnancy. See your doctor if you have concerns.

Swelling and Varicose Veins

Swelling is normal during pregnancy. It occurs most often in the legs. It is caused by the growing uterus putting pressure on the blood vessels that carry fluid from the feet and ankles. Too little protein in your diet may also cause your body to retain fluid. If you have swelling in your hands and face, notify your doctor, as this can signify another problem. Varicose veins are swollen veins that appear most often in the legs but can also appear near the vagina. They are caused by pressure from the weight of the baby on the veins. They tend to occur more often if you have to stand or sit for long periods of time. Here are some things you can do to help reduce swelling and relieve the

discomfort: Elevate your legs whenever possible. Lie on your side in bed. Don't wear anything that binds your legs, such as tight stockings on your ankles, and exercise daily.

Feeling Short of Breath

You may feel short of breath as the baby grows and fills up your abdomen. As your baby grows inside your uterus, it expands and takes up room in your abdomen. By the third trimester, the uterus has grown so large that it presses against the digestive organs and the diaphragm, and they press up against the lungs. This limits the room the lungs can expand, which can leave you short of breath. A few weeks before you give birth, the baby's head will move down in the uterus. This usually happens between 36 and 38 weeks of pregnancy in women who have not been pregnant before. In women who have had a previous pregnancy, it may not happen until the beginning of labor. When this happens, you will find it easier to breathe.

Resources

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