

What You're Experiencing

The second trimester spans weeks fourteen through twenty-six. What's happening to your body and your feelings?

Your body is going through a lot of changes to make room for your baby and to give her what she needs in order to develop. Your body is also going through some changes to get ready for delivery. Even though most of these changes are to be expected, let's look at the things you can do to make yourself more comfortable. Most of the changes and discomforts you'll experience can be helped with a little extra self-care and rest.

Itching. You may find your tummy itches. The itching is caused by your skin stretching and tightening as it expands with your growing uterus. Try wearing loose clothing made of natural fibers, like cotton, to keep from irritating your skin. Try using unscented lotions to keep your skin moisturized as it stretches. You can also use an anti-itch cream, such as calamine lotion, for some relief.¹

Stretch marks. You can help minimize *stretch marks* by drinking lots of water, taking your vitamins, *exercising*, and by not gaining more weight than is healthy for your pregnancy. Also, creams that contain centella asiatica extract, vitamin E, and collagen-elastin hydrolysates have been found to prevent or lessen stretch marks in some women, so look for those ingredients when selecting a cream.^{2,3}

Mask of Pregnancy. You might notice bits of darker skin on your upper lip, your nose, and other places on your face. This is known as the "mask of pregnancy." Your pregnancy hormones are responsible for these darker patches. Wear a sunscreen and hat when outdoors.¹

Back and Leg Aches. It's natural that you're gaining weight as your baby grows, but that can make your back or legs ache. To help ease these aches and pains, get more rest and apply gentle heat to the aching areas. Consider using a heating pad to help ease those aches.³

Breast Changes. By the end of this trimester, your *breasts* will be ready to feed your baby. You can ease the discomfort by wearing a *maternity bra* that offers good *support*. Your breasts may also begin to leak a little, and even leave some wet spots on your bra or shirt. Carry nursing pads with you so you can tuck one inside each cup of your bra to absorb the fluid and protect your clothing.⁴

Linea Nigra. This is a darker vertical line that extends from your belly button down to your pubic hairline. If this line bothers you, then keep your tummy covered or use a good sunscreen if you go out in the sun.⁵

Vaginal Discharge. You might also feel concerned if you notice a *white*, milky discharge from your vagina. Don't *douche* or use tampons— but it's okay to use panty liners.^{6,7}

Hemorrhoids and Varicose Veins. Varicose veins look like swollen veins in your legs. To help avoid them and decrease swelling, sit with your legs and feet raised and don't wear tight knee-high stockings. Hemorrhoids are painful or itchy swollen *veins* around your anus. To help prevent them, stay well hydrated and eat a *healthy*, balanced diet, especially one rich in fiber. Avoiding *constipation* is the main way to control or avoid them.⁶

Swollen Tissues. Your tissues might swell a bit too, and that can make your hands feel numb or tingly. While it's distracting, it's nothing to worry about! To help with the numbness or tingling, take more frequent rests from your computer or from typing on your phone.

Dental Changes. Your changing hormones can also lead to tender or bleeding gums and an increased risk of tooth decay, so it's important to continue to brush and floss your teeth regularly. Tell your dentist you're pregnant and schedule dental checkups throughout your pregnancy to keep your mouth healthy.

Self-Care. Get more rest and sleep. Eat a healthy diet and get some low-impact exercise, if your provider allows it. And finally, ask for support from your partner or from friends or family who are supporting you through this pregnancy.

When to Call Your Provider

If you feel depressed for most of *each* day or have thoughts of harming yourself, you should *contact* your provider immediately.⁹

Contact your provider immediately if you see or experience:¹⁰

- Bleeding from your vagina
- Sudden or severe swelling in your face, hands or fingers, or sudden weight gain
- Painful headaches
- Painful cramping in your tummy or abdomen
- Fever and chills
- Vomiting or regularly experiencing nausea
- Burning when you urinate
- Or if you are dizzy or things look blurry

Healthy Pregnancy

You may be looking forward to delivering your baby or being done with pregnancy. What can you do to make your pregnancy easier and be healthy now and after your baby is born? Eat a diet that provides the nutrients and fiber that you and the baby need. Plan to get two-and-a-half hours each week of gentle exercise that gets your heart rate up, such as walking, swimming, or stretching. If you're used to it, dancing or cycling can be fun too, but be careful as your balance may be a little off with a growing tummy.¹⁰

Here are some things you shouldn't risk doing while you're pregnant.

- Don't smoke.
- Don't use any street drugs.
- Don't drink alcohol.

Those aren't good for you and aren't good for your baby. If your provider agrees, then some caffeine is okay in the second or third trimester¹¹, but it's best to avoid energy drinks altogether. Keep in mind, in these next weeks – much of what you'll experience is normal for a pregnant woman in her second trimester. But if you're ever concerned, then give your provider a call— both to set your mind at ease and to be sure things are going just as they should be.

Resources include:

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4. Diane Spatz, Ph.D. "I'm Not Breastfeeding. Will My Breast Milk Dry up on Its Own?" BabyCenter, www.babycenter.com/404_im-not-breastfeeding-will-my-breast-milk-dry-up-on-its-own_11730.bc. accessed 1/31/2019.
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10. "Staying Healthy and Safe | Office on Women's Health." Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 14 Mar. 2019, www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/youre-pregnant-now-what/staying-healthy-and-safe?sf19330302=1. accessed 1/31/2019.
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13. "Second Trimester: Fetal Development." American Pregnancy Association, 16 July 2021, americanpregnancy.org/healthy-pregnancy/pregnancy-health-wellness/second-trimester/. accessed 1/31/2019.
14. Milestones of Early Life: How You Began Your Journey. Heritage House. 2018. Snowflake, AZ.