

The third trimester spans weeks 27 to birth.<sup>1</sup> It's hard to believe how big your tummy can stretch as your baby grows. Don't worry! Your body naturally knows what to do to grow a baby and get ready for labor.

## What You're Experiencing

Things are likely getting a little crowded in your body as your baby grows and begins to run out of room. As your belly gets bigger, your center of gravity shifts, and you are more prone to falls – so be careful, take things slowly, and be sure you have your balance before you begin to move.<sup>2</sup> With a growing baby and your organs shifting to accommodate your expanding uterus, you will be experiencing a few discomforts. Many can be eased with rest, staying well hydrated, by eating a healthy diet and taking your prenatal vitamin. Here are some of the physical changes you may be experiencing:

- Shortness of breath<sup>3</sup>
- Swelling<sup>11,12,13</sup>
- Stretch marks<sup>3,12,18,19</sup>
- Belly button changes<sup>3,22</sup>
- The baby “dropping”<sup>23,24</sup>
- Heartburn<sup>4,5,6,7,8,9,10</sup>
- Hemorrhoids & constipation<sup>8,14,15,16</sup>
- Dry skin<sup>3,18</sup>
- Tiredness<sup>2,3,14</sup>
- Mild contractions<sup>10,15,25</sup>
- Increased need to pee<sup>11</sup>
- Leg cramps<sup>12,17</sup>
- Tender breasts<sup>3,20,21</sup>
- Insomnia<sup>8,14</sup>
- Changing emotions<sup>26</sup>

## When to Call Your Provider

It's important to contact your provider immediately if you experience:

- Sudden or severe swelling in the face, hands, or fingers
- Severe or long-lasting headaches
- Fever or chills
- Discomfort, pain, or burning with urination
- Dizziness
- Your baby moving less than normal (less than 10 movements in a two-hour period)
- Bleeding, or fluid leaking from the vagina
- Symptoms of true labor
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby<sup>2</sup>

## Signs of Labor

All these changes. It helps to know why they're happening, and what you can do to be more comfortable. Remember— avoid fatty and spicy foods to prevent heartburn. Get enough fiber and drink more water to avoid constipation and hemorrhoids. Drinking water will also help with

stretch marks and dry skin. Rest more—with your feet up—to help with swelling. Lay on your left side to take pressure off your kidneys and veins. Stretch to avoid leg cramps. Finally, be aware of the signs of labor and be ready for when it's time to head to the hospital.<sup>25</sup>

Braxton Hicks can be triggered when you or your baby are very active, when someone touches your tummy, when you have a full bladder, or if you haven't had enough *water*. As you near the end of this trimester, you will experience stronger but still irregular Braxton Hicks contractions.

Prior to 36 weeks, more than *four* contractions per hour is too much, but after 36 weeks, more of these types of contractions are okay.<sup>10</sup> At first, contractions feel like menstrual *cramps* or a lower backache. Each contraction will start in the lower back and radiate to the front, or vice versa. When you notice this, you should begin writing down the time each contraction starts and how long it lasts. *When these painful contractions become regular and frequent, you should either call your provider or head straight to the hospital.*<sup>10</sup> Lastly, if your baby is not moving as much as you normally experience—generally *ten* movements in two hours—you should contact your provider immediately.<sup>10</sup>

Resources include:

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