

WHAT TO EXPECT NOW THAT YOU'RE PREGNANT

Provided by Dr. Souhail Asfour

Pregnancy should be a pleasant time for you, but some body changes may appear. If you know about them, they are less likely to worry you. The changes are usually due to the hormones of pregnancy or physical body adaptation to the pregnancy.

WHAT ARE THE NORMAL BODY CHANGES THAT I MAY FEEL WHILE PREGNANT?

Your breasts will get larger and firmer. The areola or dark areas around your nipples will get darker and may develop bumps in them. Veins in the breast may become more noticeable. At around months 4 and 5 of your pregnancy your nipples may start giving off a clear or cloudy liquid.

You may experience nausea/vomiting, and heartburn during pregnancy. These discomforts can be helped by eating smaller meals and eating more often. For example, rather than eating three regular meals a day, try six small meals each day. Also, try to snack on plain crackers or toast (without butter) especially early in the morning before getting out of bed. For heartburn, try not to lie down for at least one hour after eating.

Your moods may change. It is not unusual for a pregnant woman to feel happy one minute then sad soon after without an apparent reason.

You may get tired more easily.

You may notice pulling pains in your lower belly and hip areas. These are usually caused by the growth of your uterus. Your belly will get larger as your baby grows inside you. You will start "showing" usually after the second half of the pregnancy but could be sooner depending on your body size and prior pregnancies.

You may notice skin changes such as stretch marks or striae (pinkish lines on your breasts or belly) later in the pregnancy and some brown blotches on your face (cloasma). Creams, lotions, or oils do not always prevent these changes. However, after pregnancy the marks tend to fade and are less noticeable.

You may get constipated and have to strain to have a bowel movement. Hemorrhoids (large blood vessels near the opening in your rectum) may develop. Constipation is best prevented or relieved by including more fiber in your diet. Foods such as fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and bran cereal are often helpful. Also, increasing the amount of fluid you take will soften the stool and relieve constipation and ease discomfort from hemorrhoids. Avoid sitting on the toilet for a prolonged time and avoid straining this worsens hemorrhoids.

You may experience changes in your legs such as cramps, swelling and possibly develop enlarged blood vessels (varicose veins).

WARNING SIGNS IN EARLY MISCARRIAGE

FOR WHAT PROBLEMS SHOULD I CALL THE OFFICE RIGHT AWAY, EVEN AT NIGHT OR WEEKENDS?

If you have heavy bleeding (more than a period), heavy cramping, or significant abdominal pain contact the office immediately. Some spotting or bleeding is not uncommon in the first trimester, but you are welcome to call the office with your concerns.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF CIGARETTES, ALCOHOL, CAFFEINE AND DRUGS?

These things can harm your unborn baby. It is best not to smoke or drink alcoholic beverages while you are pregnant.

It is wise to check with your doctor about the safety of any medication before taking it. But, if you are taking medication necessary to your health, do not stop the medication without discussing it with your doctor.

IS IT TRUE THAT CATS MAY CARRY A DISEASE THAT COULD AFFECT MY BABY WHILE I AM PREGNANT?

Cats may carry a disease that is called Toxoplasmosis. Even though it is rare, it has been known to cause very serious problems in newborn babies including mental retardation, growth failure, blindness, and deafness. To prevent it, avoid changing the cats litter box as the disease is usually spread to humans by cat litter/feces.

Raw or poorly cooked meat (especially beef) is another cause of this disease. Cook all meat until it is well done. It is important to wash your hands after handling raw meat.

IF I AM IN AN ACCIDENT, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

In anything more than a simple fender-bender, you should get checked by your doctor as soon as possible. This is true even if you are not hurting as your baby could be affected. You may need some simple tests to be sure your baby is doing well. If any vaginal bleeding or contractions occur, call us immediately.

EXERCISE IN PREGNANCY

Regular exercise during pregnancy is a good idea. It makes you feel good and keeps you healthy. What is comfortable, and safe, depends on the level of fitness you have achieved before you

became pregnant. This is NOT the time to take on a new sport or increase your fitness level. Exercise three times a week, whether you are pregnant or not, is far better than exercising in spurts. But there are some special changes your body experiences during pregnancy you need to be aware of which will affect any exercise you do. Be sure you set up a safe exercise program because pregnancy changes your body, which could affect the way you exercise. For example, your ligaments become easier to stretch. That is why you feel a little wobbly just walking. It is easier to sprain something, like an ankle or to pull a muscle. As your baby grows, your weight distribution is different; your center of gravity changes which can make it easier for you to lose your balance. Your ability to catch your breath (get enough oxygen) is decreased during exercise. Because of these changes in your breathing and circulation systems you may occasionally experience dizziness or weakness. Now, when you exercise, you will notice you don't have the aerobic capacity you did before. Your heart rate when you are at rest is higher than it was before you became pregnant and will rise more rapidly when you exercise. With some adjustments you can continue to enjoy exercising and return slowly, to your desired program after your baby is born. If you are in doubt about what kind of exercise or sport you can do, consult your doctor.

ARE THERE TIMES WHEN I SHOULD NOT EXERCISE AT ALL?

Yes, you may have to modify your exercise routine if you:

1. Have problems with early labor
2. Are excessively underweight
3. Have blood pressure, heart, lung, or thyroid problems
4. Have experienced vaginal bleeding during the pregnancy
5. Are having problems with your baby's growth
6. Are severely anemic
7. Having leaking form your bag of water
8. Have experienced #1, 3, or 5 on the above list during a different pregnancy

HOW ABOUT SOME GUIDELINES FOR SAFE EXERCISING THAT I CAN USE DURING MY PREGNANCY?

1. Drink enough before exercising, even in the winter.
2. Warm up slowly, at least 5 minutes before starting.
3. Stretch, but not to your limit so as not to injure your ligaments. Remember they are looser now.
4. Avoid exercises with jerky or bouncing motions.
5. Use a stable floor. Avoid loose rugs that may slide.
6. Exercise regularly (every other day), not just once in a while.
7. No competitive exercises.
8. Do not exercise during hot humid weather or if you have a fever.
9. Your body temperature should not go above 38 degree C. (101 degrees F.). Avoid the use of hot tubs and saunas.
10. Exercise should be followed by a cool down period to help heart rate return to normal and cool your body off
11. After the first trimester do not exercise lying down on your back for prolonged period of time.

