

# Common Symptoms You'll Experience During Pregnancy and Birth

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Becoming a Mom is an experience unlike any other. Every woman will have a unique journey through their pregnancy, starting with their individual reasons for becoming pregnant, through the delivery and beyond.

At each stage of your pregnancy, you'll feel different. You can ask others what they experienced, but they may have felt things you'll never encounter. That's why it's smart to educate yourself about a full range of possibilities so that nothing's a surprise to you – and nothing causes you to head to the doctor in a panic.

## **First Signs That You Might Be Pregnant**

One frightening thing you may have heard about in the news are women who suddenly feel as if they ate something bad, head to the emergency room, and leave with a baby they didn't know they were carrying.

This is highly unusual and, in most cases, you're going to have plenty of signs that tell you it's time to go in for an official blood test to confirm that you're pregnant.

The most common sign is a missed period. If you're consistent with your menstrual cycle and you suddenly miss a month, you need to get an at home pregnancy test and see if it confirms your suspicions.

Sometimes, it's just an irregularity, so you may not be pregnant. And sometimes it's too soon for an at home pregnancy test to confirm the diagnosis, so you may want to either wait one more month or go in for a blood test at this point.

Some women will have a very spotty period – or it might be very short compared to how their usual menstrual cycle works. Cramping is normal, too – and neither of these symptoms means you are miscarrying. It's part of the implant process where the egg nestles into the lining of your uterus.

Initial symptoms may also include mood swings like crying or getting angry. Even extreme happiness can occur – because your hormones are all over the map. If you find yourself crying for no reason, it could be that you're pregnant!

Some of the common symptoms of pregnancy mimic your menstrual cycle symptoms. Swollen, tender breasts are a good example of this. You probably experience this a week before your period as part of your PMS symptoms, but it happens when you become pregnant, too.

### **Pregnancy Symptoms During the First Trimester**

The first signs and symptoms of pregnancy that we just discussed can occur throughout your first trimester. Morning sickness may or may not happen to you. You might initially think you're coming down with the flu, or you have food poisoning. In reality, it's the beginning of a wonderful 9-month journey that makes you nauseous.

Some women experience morning sickness *only* in the morning. Others have it all day long. There are different ways you can alleviate this symptom. Keep crackers by your bed to eat before you get up. Use the "seasick bands" you can wear on your wrists. If those don't work, ask your doctor for advice on what medications he or she feels are suitable during pregnancy.

Certain smells and foods may make you sick to your stomach. This includes items you previously craved and thought were delicious! At the same time, you might suddenly start craving things you never would have eaten before. This is very normal, so just feed your body what it wants.

You might notice that you have to go to the restroom more often. Your bladder will start to produce more urine and you'll have to empty it frequently – during the day and throughout the night.

You might experience extreme fatigue during the initial stages of pregnancy. You won't have as much energy and because you're also feeling some morning sickness, it might make you confirm your feeling of having the flu. If it doesn't end, like the flu would, then it could be due to pregnancy.

Dizziness and lightheadedness are common during the first trimester. Fainting is fairly common, so you want to be careful when you start to feel this way and prepare for this by sitting down and not forcing yourself to try to stand until the feeling passes.

Headaches are also common during the first trimester. You may have never experienced frequent headaches before, and suddenly they're cropping up on a regular basis.

You want to check with your doctor to see what headache remedy he or she advises you to take because anything you take is also going to get to your baby, so you have to be careful not to take too much of anything – or the wrong kind of medication.

The first trimester can be draining. You might be very emotional and your body is undergoing changes. But once this part is over, you'll start to feel much better in most cases.

### **Pregnancy Symptoms During the Second Trimester**

This is commonly known as your honeymoon period of pregnancy because it's generally the time when the bad symptoms subside and you feel fantastic! You've probably heard about how a pregnant woman starts to "glow" during pregnancy. This is when it happens.

The baby fluttering begins. This is when you suddenly feel the baby move. It feels like a butterfly is captured in a jar and its wings are softly fluttering around inside.

At first, you might wonder if your body had a simple spasm, but then you'll get used to it and realize that it's the baby moving around in you. Don't be alarmed when you don't feel it – it simply means the baby is being still.

As you approach the last trimester, you might even experience your baby having a case of the hiccups. You'll know because it's a consistent blip as opposed to random movements in your womb.

Constipation might start to be an issue during the second trimester. Some women experience it, and others don't. Talk to your doctor about a safe remedy for this problem. You don't want to add hemorrhoids to your list of symptoms.

The areola around your nipples may darken during this time. This is perfectly normal and should be no cause for alarm. Not everyone will experience this, so if your stay the same color, that's fine, too.

Your breasts *will* probably grow quite a bit during this time, though. And so will your stomach. This is when people start to realize you're pregnant, so if you haven't told anyone yet, now's the time!

As your body expands, you might start noticing stretch marks appearing on your stomach, and sometimes other areas like your upper thighs. You can use topical lotions with vitamin E to help your body maintain a flawless appearance.

Aside from the baby moving, you might also feel another type of symptom – false contractions known as Braxton Kicks. This doesn't mean you're going into labor. They're not as strong and they're inconsistent.

And you might begin to feel leg cramps – especially at night when you're sleeping. This is common and painful, but it does go away. Some women drink milk or extra water to help alleviate this, but if one strikes, just massage it and wait for it to go away.

### **Pregnancy Symptoms During the Third Trimester**

When you get into the third trimester, the honeymoon period is over and fatigue sets in all over again. You may not get morning sickness anymore, but because you're carrying a baby, and your body is changing, you'll tire more easily.

You might notice a faint or dark line going straight down the middle of your stomach. Don't be alarmed. This is known as the linea nigra. It goes away after you give birth, so it's not permanent.

Your belly button may protrude at this time because your stomach is filled to the brim with your lively little baby. This will go back to normal after you give birth, so don't worry about it at this time.

In addition to the fatigue, you might feel short of breath from time to time. This is partially because you're tired, but also because the baby is taking up so much space in the last trimester!

This, paired with the fact that your lungs are working overtime to carry plenty of oxygen to your baby through your blood supply, leave you feeling winded easily. Just take your time and understand you might be slower during this period.

Your weight will soar during this time because the baby is growing rapidly. This is normal, but you want to watch the extreme weight gain. Talk to your doctor about maintaining normal growth during the third trimester.

Your back will hurt because of the added strain on your body, but make sure you're not experiencing a bladder or kidney infection. These are common during pregnancy, and you'll likely notice a burning sensation when you go to the restroom.

Heartburn is one symptom that most pregnant women complain about during pregnancy – especially the last trimester. Your uterus is pushing our stomach up, causing food to come back up.

This makes sleeping very uncomfortable. One way to fix this is to try sleeping in an upright position during the last trimester, or elevating your head and chest a bit more than you used to.

One symptom that has a fine line of normalcy is vaginal discharge. Some is normal – but if you're noticing a ton of it, then you need to head to the doctor to make sure it's not amniotic fluid leaking.

### **Common Issues That Occur During Birth**

Many women – especially first-time moms – worry that they won't recognize when they're going into labor. They're also concerned about what's normal and what's not while they're giving birth.

You might start feeling consistent contractions. Unlike Braxton Hicks, these real labor pains last longer and don't go away for good – they come back on a timed interval, getting closer and closer every hour.

Back pain can get a bit extreme. Some women think labor contractions are only located in the front, where their womb is – but you also feel it in your back, deep in the lower area.

You may notice a white discharge from your vagina known as the mucus plug. This is normal. Your doctor will be able to tell you if it's passed or not. This may or may not be something you even notice.

Your water will break at some point. It might be when you're at home or out somewhere. Or, it could be in the hospital after you're feeling contractions and have been admitted.

Some doctors will go ahead and break your bag of water for you, helping move labor along so that you delivery your baby faster. It will feel like a warm gush of water and it can be clear – but sometimes it's not if there is meconium (fecal stool) in the amniotic fluid.

Labor can last from a few hours to over a day. Every woman is different. It sometimes goes faster once a woman has already given birth to a previous child, but this isn't set in stone.

This is a very tiring process. Many hospitals don't want you to eat during this time, so they give you ice chips to chew on. You might feel nauseous all over again.

You'll have pain relief options if you choose to use them, such as an epidural. Go over all of these with your health care specialist to determine which one is right for you.

Some women worry about having a bowel movement while pushing their baby out, but this does not always happen and if it does, you probably won't know. They're ready for it and will have it cleaned and gone before you even realize it happened.

After the baby is delivered, you'll be so consumed with watching and listening to your baby that you may not even pay much attention to the process of delivering the placenta. And when all is said and done, you'll need to relax and recover from an exhausting, yet satisfying nine-month journey to happiness.



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