

## Changing Body in Pregnancy

- ❖ Pregnancy is filled with emotional and physical changes that can affect a woman's body image and self-esteem.
- ❖ How you perceive your body image during pregnancy is just as important as the way you perceive your role as mother, wife, partner and person.

## Early Signs & Symptoms

A missed menstrual period is the most obvious sign of pregnancy. Other early signs and symptoms of pregnancy include:

- **Tender, swollen breasts**: Sensitive, sore breasts, caused by increasing hormone levels, are an early sign of pregnancy. The soreness may feel like a more intense version of how your breasts feel before your menstrual period. The pain and discomfort should decrease after the first few weeks, as your body adjusts to the hormonal changes.
- **Nausea or vomiting**: Most women do not experience nausea or vomiting until about one month after becoming pregnant. However, some women do feel nauseous earlier, while others never experience it all.
- **Fatigue**: Fatigue is a common symptom of early pregnancy. You should start to feel more energetic once you enter your second trimester. Fatigue usually returns late in pregnancy, when you're carrying around more weight and the common discomforts of pregnancy make it more difficult to get a good night's sleep.
- **Moodiness**: You may notice that your emotions are up one moment and down the next. Mood swings are normal during this time.

## Braxton Hicks Contractions

Many women experience Braxton Hicks contractions as early as the second trimester.

- Sometimes they are very mild and feel like a slight tightness in your abdomen. Other times, they can be painful.
- Braxton Hicks contractions help your body gear up for birth, but do not open the cervix.
- They typically occur in the afternoon or evening, after physical activity or after sexual intercourse, and are more likely to occur when you are tired or dehydrated, so be sure to drink plenty of fluids.

- Braxton Hicks contractions may occur more often and become stronger as your due date draws nearer.

## Breast Changes

- ❖ Your breasts begin changing early in pregnancy to prepare for feeding the baby.
- ❖ Fat builds up in the breasts,
- ❖ the number of milk glands increases, and
- ❖ the nipples and areolas (the pink or brownish skin around your nipples) enlarge and darken.
- ❖ Your breasts may become very sore.
  
- ❖ Your breasts may grow in size and weight throughout the first three months. If they make you uncomfortable, switch to a good maternity bra.
  - These bras have wide straps, more cup coverage and extra rows of hooks so you can adjust the band size as your baby grows.
  - You also may want to buy a special sleep bra for nighttime support and,
  - if you exercise, a supportive athletic bra.

By the end of your third trimester, your breasts may start leaking a thick, yellow fluid called colostrum.

- ❖ Colostrum contains proteins and antibodies that nourish your newborn until your breasts start making milk a few days after birth.
- ❖ Don't worry if your breasts don't leak — it doesn't happen to all women.

## Constipation

Increased hormone levels slow the functioning of your digestive system, which can lead to constipation.

To help ease constipation,

- drink plenty of liquids
- increase your fiber intake by eating fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Because increased fiber consumption can cause gas formation, try eating your meals more slowly and avoid anything that causes you to swallow air, such as chewing gum and carbonated drinks.
- Your body will eventually adjust to these dietary changes.
- If these measures don't ease constipation, you can try OTC stool softener, which are safe

## Dental Care

Pregnancy hormones can make your gums swell and bleed, but don't let this keep you from brushing and flossing.

- Switching to a softer brush may help lessen irritation.

- Don't cancel your regular dental visit just because you are pregnant.
- A dental checkup early in pregnancy helps make sure that your mouth stays healthy.
- Pregnant women are at an increased risk for cavities and gum disease.

It's safe to have dental work during pregnancy; just be sure to let your dentist know you're pregnant and try to avoid xrays. If you do have xrays, be sure to use the lead apron on your lap and the neck guard to protect your thyroid.

## Fatigue

You will probably feel totally exhausted during your first trimester. You may even find it hard to get out of bed in the morning. This is normal.

- Your hormone levels have increased, and your metabolism is running high and burning energy, even while you sleep.
- Many women experience even more fatigue during subsequent pregnancies than during their first because they must take care of their children in addition to other demands on their time.
- Fatigue usually goes away after the first trimester — for a while.
- Although most of your energy will return by your fourth month, most women begin to feel tired again in the last months of pregnancy.

## Heartburn

Heartburn is a burning feeling or pain in the throat and chest that is common among pregnant women.

- It can be caused by pregnancy hormones, which relax the valve between your stomach and esophagus (the tube leading from the mouth to the stomach).
- When the valve between your esophagus and stomach doesn't close, stomach acids leak into the esophagus.
- As your uterus grows, it adds to the problem by pressing up against your stomach.
- If you are bothered by heartburn, try these remedies:
  - Eat six small meals per day instead of three big ones
  - Eat slowly and chew your food well.
  - Don't drink a lot of liquid with your meals. Drink fluids between meals instead.
  - Don't eat or drink within a few hours of bedtime.
  - Don't lie down right after meals, either.
  - Try raising the head of your bed. Prop a few extra pillows under your shoulders, or put a couple of books or wood blocks under the legs at the head of the bed.
  - Avoid foods that are known to make acid reflux worse, such as citrus fruits, chocolate, and spicy or fried foods.

Over-the-counter antacids are safe to use during pregnancy,

- as long as they **do not contain aluminum or a salicylate, such as aspirin (avoid Alka Seltzer and Pepto Bismol)**.
- Antacids that contain magnesium or calcium are fine, such as Tums, Rolaids or Mylanta or Pepcid Complete

## Lower Back Pain

Backache is one of the most common pregnancy-related problems, especially in the later months.

- You can probably blame your growing uterus and hormonal changes for your aching back.
- Your expanding uterus shifts your center of gravity and stretches out and weakens your abdominal muscles, changing your posture and putting a strain on your back.
- The extra weight you're carrying means more work for your muscles and increased stress on your joints, which is why your back may feel worse at the end of the day.

Here are some tips to help lessen back pain:

- Wear low-heeled (but not flat) shoes with good arch support, such as walking shoes or athletic shoes. High heels tilt your body forward and strain your lower-back muscles.
- Do exercises to stretch and strengthen your back muscles.
- Don't bend at the waist to pick something up. If you must lift something, squat down, bend your knees and keep your back straight.
- Get off your feet. If you have to stand for a long time, rest one foot on a stool or a box to take the strain off your back.
- Sit in chairs with good back support, or tuck a small pillow behind your lower back.
- Use an abdominal support garment (for sale in maternity stores and catalogs). It looks like a girdle and helps take the weight of your belly off your back muscles. Also, some maternity pants come with a wide elastic band that fits under the curve of your belly to help support its weight.

## Nausea & Vomiting

Nausea and vomiting usually start around the sixth week of pregnancy. Although these symptoms are often called "morning sickness," they can occur at any time of day or night.

- About half of the women who experience nausea and vomiting feel complete relief around 14 weeks.

- For others, it takes another month or so for the queasiness to ease up.
- It may return later, though, and come and go throughout pregnancy.
- Until the nausea and vomiting go away, there are a few things you can do to ease them:

**Take a supplement:** Vitamin B6 is known to help relieve nausea in some women. We may recommend a combination of vitamin B6 and an over-the-counter medication called doxylamine.

**Keep snacks by the bed:** Try eating dry toast or crackers in the morning before you get out of bed to avoid moving around on an empty stomach.

**Drink fluids:** Your body needs more water in these early months, so drink fluids often during the day.

**Eat small and often:** Make sure your stomach is never empty by eating five or six small meals each day. Try the “BRATT” diet (bananas, rice, applesauce, toast and tea), which is low in fat and easy to digest.

**Try ginger:** Ginger ale made with real ginger, ginger tea made from fresh grated ginger, and ginger candies can help settle your queasy stomach.

## Numbness

Numbness or tingling in your hands, fingers or toes is a normal reaction caused by your body’s swelling tissues pressing on the nerves.

- In severe cases, you may develop carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by the compression of a nerve within the carpal tunnel, a passageway of bones and ligaments in the wrist.
- These symptoms usually go away after you give birth and the tissues return to normal.
- Splints and resting the affected hand are typically used to treat these symptoms during pregnancy.

## Pelvic Pressure & Bone Pain

The two halves of your pelvis are connected at the front by a joint called the pubic symphysis, which is normally stiff and hardly moves.

- The hormones that loosens the joints also makes the pubic symphysis more flexible during and just after pregnancy.
- Sometimes, the increased movement in the joint causes pain in the pelvic area.
- To get some relief, try to avoid prolonged standing and heavy lifting. Exercises for the abdomen and pelvic muscles also can help.

As your approach your due date, the baby will start to get into position for birth, and you may feel him settling deeper into your pelvis.

- This sensation, often called “dropping,” will cause some increased pressure

in the pelvis, bladder and hips.

- There is not much you can do about the pressure other than try to stay off your feet when you are most uncomfortable.

## Stretch Marks

- Reddish brown, purple or dark brown streaks may appear on your belly and breasts later in pregnancy. Some women also get them on their buttocks, hips and thighs.
- Stretch marks are caused by changes in the elastic supportive tissue that lies just beneath the skin. There are no proven remedies to keep them from appearing or to make them go away.
- Keeping your belly well moisturized as it grows may reduce itching, however. Once your baby is born, some of these streaks will slowly fade in color.

## Varicose Veins & Hemorrhoids

The weight of your uterus pressing down on a major vein called the inferior vena cava can slow blood flow from your lower body. The result may be sore, itchy, blue bulges on your legs called varicose veins. These veins also can appear near your vagina and vulva. When they appear on the anus and rectum, they are called hemorrhoids. In most cases, varicose veins do not cause significant problems and are more of a cosmetic issue.

**Varicose veins** are more likely to occur if this isn't your first pregnancy.

They also tend to run in families.

Although there is nothing you can do to prevent varicose veins, there are ways to relieve the swelling and soreness and perhaps help stop them from getting worse:

- If you must sit or stand for long periods, be sure to move around often.
- Don't sit with your legs crossed.
- Prop up your legs — on a couch, chair or footstool — as often as you can.
- Wear support hose that do not constrict at the thigh or knee.
- Don't wear stockings or socks that have a tight band of elastic around the legs

For **hemorrhoids**, try these remedies:

- Eat a high-fiber diet and drink plenty of liquids.
- Keep your weight gain within the limits your doctor suggests. Extra pounds can make hemorrhoids worse.
- Sitting for a long time puts pressure on the veins in your pelvic area. Get up and move around to shift the weight of your uterus off these veins.
- If you do get hemorrhoids, apply an ice pack or witch hazel pads to the area to relieve pain and reduce swelling.
- Try soaking in a warm (not hot) tub a few times a day.
- Over the counter remedies are generally safe

See SAFE MEDICATIONS DURING PREGNANCY in Pt Resources / Patient Education