



common conditions in pregnancy

CLINICAL INFORMATION FOR PRACTITIONERS AND PATIENTS

Morning Sickness

Morning sickness is a common occurrence in pregnancy and can happen at any time of the day or night. It is a result of the increased hormone levels and in most cases it resolves by the end of the first trimester but can last for the entire pregnancy. Eating small regular meals, with adequate protein and fluids, can be very beneficial in relieving this condition. Some women experience nausea as soon as they get out of bed in the morning. When this is the case, wherever possible, organise for someone to bring you a slice of dry toast or a few plain crackers and a cup of Ginger tea. Ginger is excellent for nausea from any cause. You can easily make Ginger tea by placing a few thin slices of fresh Ginger in a cup and adding boiling water. Let it infuse for about 10 minutes if possible. You can either have it as warm tea or you can make a large jug and drink it cold throughout the day. If nausea and vomiting continue to be a significant problem speak to your practitioner for further advice. They will also be able to prescribe appropriate herbal and/or nutritional medicine if this is required.

Heartburn

Some women experience heartburn during pregnancy. This occurs due to the increased level of hormones, particularly progesterone, which reduces the effectiveness of the sphincter between the stomach and the oesophagus. As with morning sickness, eating small regular meals really helps reduce the discomfort caused by heartburn. Avoid very spicy and fatty foods as well as lying down immediately after eating. Additionally, when lying down elevate your head with a pillow or raise the head of the bed a couple of inches. Herbal teas such as Chamomile, Fennel or Peppermint taken before meals can alleviate the symptoms. Slippery Elm powder after meals may also help.

Constipation

Constipation is common in pregnancy and results from slowed motility in the gastrointestinal tract. One of the major causes of constipation is inadequate fluid intake, so make sure you drink plenty of filtered water throughout the day. Dietary fibre, in conjunction with adequate fluid, can help relieve constipation. Eat lots of fresh vegetables, fruit and whole grains. Slippery Elm is helpful and can be taken as a capsule or powder. The powder can be mixed with food and goes well with yoghurt and banana or rolled oats porridge. Gentle exercise also plays a role in alleviating constipation.

Vaginal Thrush

Vaginal thrush often occurs in pregnancy and is caused by a microscopic fungal organism known as *Candida albicans*. This organism is found in the gastrointestinal tract of men and women, and many women also have it in the vagina. It is only when the numbers grow out of control that it becomes a problem. The main symptoms are a 'cottage cheese-like' discharge and an intense itch. The likelihood of vaginal thrush occurring can be reduced significantly by eating good quality, plain yoghurt regularly and by avoiding yeasts and sugars in your diet. This means not only avoiding the obvious high sugar foods such as chocolate, lollies and cakes, but you also need to avoid drinking fruit juices and to not eat more than three pieces of fruit daily. As a general rule, fruit should be avoided altogether when you actually have vaginal thrush. Wear cotton underwear and do not wash underwear in harsh detergents or fabric softeners. Improving immunity and taking a supplement containing beneficial intestinal flora such as acidophilus can also help. Speak to your practitioner who can recommend the best quality and most appropriate products for your situation.

Muscle Cramps

Leg cramps are more likely to become problematic after the first trimester and often occur at night, although they may also happen during the day. The exact cause is unknown but it may result from impeded circulation due to the pressure that the growing uterus puts on the blood vessels, or they may occur because of nutrient deficiencies. Remember your needs increase during pregnancy. See your practitioner to check for any deficiencies. Do not self medicate, especially during pregnancy. There are things you can do to help prevent leg cramps – avoid sitting with crossed legs and do gentle regular exercise that works the legs eg walking. Do stretching exercises every day, rotate feet and ankles to help circulation in the lower legs, and remember to drink plenty of fluid. When lying down always try to lie on the left side, this aids circulation to the legs. Pregnancy massage can also be beneficial because it improves circulation and moves waste products out of the muscles. Ask your practitioner if they can recommend a massage therapist.



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Musculoskeletal Pain

As your tummy grows there is increased strain on your lower back and you may experience some discomfort in this area. Pregnancy massage and relaxing warm baths can be very helpful. If you experience a more painful condition such as sciatica (pain extending from the hip down the back of the thigh), speak to your practitioner. There are a number of herbal medicines and nutrients that can be beneficial in such circumstances but they do need to be prescribed by a qualified practitioner.

Varicose Veins/Haemorrhoids

Varicose veins and haemorrhoids occur because of the increased pressure put on the circulation by the growing uterus and increased weight. You can help to avoid them by not putting on excessive weight whilst pregnant and by avoiding constipation. When sitting, avoid crossing your legs or ankles, elevate your feet and legs but avoid sharp edges pressing into your ankles or calves because this will impede circulation. You are more likely to have these conditions if they occur in other family members. If you have varicose veins wear support stockings. Foods such as blueberries may be beneficial and vitamin C with bioflavonoids can strengthen the blood vessel walls. There are also a number of herbal medicines that can help. Speak to your practitioner, they can prescribe the most appropriate treatment for you.

Fluid Retention

Fluid retention affects more than 50 per cent of pregnant women and is more likely to occur in the third trimester but can arise at any time. It usually affects the feet, legs and hands, and is generally worse at the end of the day. Fluid retention can be associated with hypertension so be sure to have your blood pressure checked. Avoid being on your feet for long periods of time, particularly avoid standing in one place without moving about. Do NOT reduce your fluid intake. Fluid retention is not an indication you are drinking too much. Avoid salt and make sure you have adequate potassium in your diet. High potassium foods include legumes, bananas, spinach, whole wheat and rye, potatoes, almonds, fish, beef and chicken. If the fluid retention becomes too uncomfortable, talk to your practitioner about appropriate herbal and nutritional medicines that can alleviate the problem.

Stretch Marks

Use a good quality moisturiser or a specially formulated oil to massage into the abdomen, buttocks, breasts and thighs. This needs to be done regularly and with increasing frequency as the pregnancy progresses. There are herbal medicines and nutritional factors that will help to reduce the likelihood of stretch marks so speak to your practitioner, preferably before conceiving or early in the pregnancy.

Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

It is important that you have your blood pressure checked regularly throughout your pregnancy, particularly if you have a history of high blood pressure or if you have had pre-eclampsia in a previous pregnancy. If this is the case, speak to your practitioner prior to conception or early in the pregnancy so that preventative measures can be put in place. Avoid salt, drink plenty of fluid, avoid stress as much as possible and be sure to eat a healthy diet and have plenty of rest and relaxation.

Gestational Diabetes

Approximately 4 to 8 per cent of pregnant women develop gestational diabetes and in most cases it resolves when the baby is born. There are a number of factors that increase the risk of developing this condition. These include being over 30 years of age, a family history of diabetes type 2 and being overweight prior to conceiving. Some ethnic groups also have increased risk. You are much less likely to develop gestational diabetes if you have a healthy diet and lifestyle and are not overweight either before or during the pregnancy. If any of the above risk factors apply to you it is best to see your practitioner prior to conceiving, or in the early stages of the pregnancy, to assess the possible risk and to employ preventative measures where necessary.

Preparing for Labour

Raspberry Leaf is wonderful for preparing the body for the birthing process. You can start taking it at the beginning of the second trimester and continued throughout the pregnancy. It can be taken as tablets, capsules, liquid herbal medicine or as a tea. In high amounts in some women it may cause constipation because of the presence of tannins. If this occurs, simply reduce the amount you are having and speak to your practitioner. You are much less likely to have problems during labour if you have maintained a healthy diet and lifestyle throughout the pregnancy. Exercise, stretching and yoga are all helpful in preparing the body for birth. There are a number of herbal medicines that can be taken in the last few weeks of pregnancy to aid the birth but these should always be prescribed by your practitioner.

