



Minor Discomforts of Pregnancy Help Guide

Backache

Upper backache may occur as breasts begin to enlarge and get heavy in preparation for breastfeeding. Generally, lower backache is more common in the last trimester as posture shifts to accommodate the enlarging uterus. Preventative measures to avoid backaches include wearing a well-fitting and supportive bra, wearing flat shoes, using proper lifting and bending techniques, avoiding the same position for long periods of time, back stretches such as the pelvic tilt and regular massage appointments or chiropractic adjustments. To help with pain, heat works wonders. Try a heat pack or hot bath. Applying a castor oil or apple cider vinegar pack can also be helpful. Abdominal support can sometimes offer back pain relief. Borrowing, purchasing, or making a maternity belt or belly sling may help. Many cultures practice belly binding for support during pregnancy and postpartum. Belts can be found at maternity or baby stores, online, or locally at Pregnancy Aid in Langley. A belly wrap or belt made of stretchy material is best.

- *When to contact the midwife: If you have sharp, or severe pain, if the backache is accompanied by a fever, burning or pain with urination, urinary frequency (more than usual), or you notice blood in your urine*

Castor Oil Pack: simply soak a piece of flannel in castor oil and place it on the painful area, covering with plastic then applying heat for 30 minutes.

Apple Cider Vinegar Pack: soak a small towel in apple cider vinegar, squeeze out excess and apply for 15 to 20 minutes to painful area.

Colds, Flu, Pneumonia, Fevers

Generally colds and flu are not harmful to mom or baby. However, in pregnancy, it is important to treat fevers promptly and this is especially important in the first trimester. If you develop a fever, please contact your midwife to discuss treatments options. During sickness, it is VERY important the mom rest, stay well nourished and drink lots of fluids. You can support your immune system in a variety of ways including taking 250 mg of vitamin C every 2 hours, but not to exceed 2000 mg daily in the first trimester and 4000 mg daily after. Vitamin C should only be taken as instructed for up to 5 days. Echinacea root tincture is an effective remedy and can be taken every two hours (take 1 drop of tincture for every 2 pounds of body weight) during times of sickness. Garlic lemonade is also a good remedy, steep 4 to 6 cloves of chopped, raw garlic in 1 quart of boiling water for 30 minutes then add the juice of 1-2 lemons and honey or maple syrup to taste. Drink warm up to 1 cup every 2 hours. If vomiting or diarrhea occur, be sure to keep up your electrolyte balance by drinking Recharge. If pneumonia were to develop in pregnancy, it is important to find early and to treat.

- *When to call the midwife: If sickness is accompanied by fever, abdominal pain, if mucous produced by cough or by nose is colored, if vomiting or diarrhea is severe, bloody, or lasts longer than 24 hours*



Constipation

Some of the hormones in pregnancy deliberately cause digestion to slow. Slowing digestion allows for more nutrients to be absorbed and delivered to your growing baby. Iron, found in prenatal vitamins or taken supplementally, can also cause constipation. Regular exercise and eating ample amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as whole grains to maximize the fiber in your diet will help. Increase clear fluid intake - drinking warm liquids in particular is helpful, and making herbal teas is a good choice. Yellow Dock is an herb that has a laxative effect. Glycerin suppositories inserted rectally can also be used. One tablespoon of Calcium-Magnesium or 250-500 mg of Magnesium Citrate before bed can also offer relief. See Constipation Remedy recipe following.

- *When to contact the midwife: If these simple measures do not produce results*

Constipation Remedy

Soak 4 dried, pitted prunes and 1 tablespoon of bran in 1 cup of warm apple juice for 15 minutes then eat and drink. Can be done morning and evening.

Edema

Edema or swelling can be a common discomfort in pregnancy. Some practitioners consider swelling to be a sign of a healthy pregnancy and good blood volume expansion. Swelling usually occurs in feet, ankles, and hands and is due to fluid volume expansion and increase in pregnancy. Also, towards the end of pregnancy, the uterus begins to place pressure on major blood vessels slowing blood return to the heart, and decreasing fluid circulation.

If swelling occurs, avoid restrictive clothing and elevate your legs periodically during the day. Placing pillows under your legs so they are elevated above your heart will help to drain fluid. Massaging in a swiping motion towards the heart helps move fluid too; you can even use some arnica oil for massage. Also, lying on the side (the left side is best) with a pillow under the belly to support ligaments at night or while being massaged will reduce pressure on blood vessels and aid circulation.

If you sit frequently throughout the day or travel in a car for long distances, stop and take time for a walk, or do some pelvic tilts and leg lifts. Exercise enhances circulation and reduces swelling.

Soaking swollen feet in a warm bath can help as well. You can add a cup of Epsom salts and some lavender flowers, rose petals, sprigs of rosemary, or drops of wintergreen oil as well. Nettle and dandelion leaf either as infusion or tincture can improve circulation and support kidneys.

Swelling can increase during the summer months or whenever perspiration occurs. When perspiring, either due to your environment or activity, be sure to drink plenty of fluids and eat more salt.

Increasing protein can also help, remember during pregnancy you should be eating 60-80 grams of protein a day (remember to use your protein handout).

- *When to contact the midwife: If swelling worsens or is persistent throughout the day, includes arms, legs, or face, or is accompanied by sudden, excessive weight gain, visual disturbances, headaches, or upper abdominal pain*



Fatigue

Needing more sleep in pregnancy is normal; you are doing some incredible work growing this baby and have earned the right for a nap. Please take naps as needed and get plenty of rest. It's important to eat nutritionally rich foods and to avoid refined foods and those containing sugar, which can lead to tiredness. Although it might sound crazy, you should get plenty of exercise during times of fatigue. Stress and emotional factors can contribute to fatigue. Exercise reduces stress as well as meditation, prayer, and counseling support. Please speak to your midwife about stress and emotional factors for other ideas and resources specific to your situation. Herbal remedies to help fatigue include yellow dock tincture which increases vitality and is energy-balancing. Aromatherapy of peppermint, lemon, orange, sandalwood, and rosemary offer a quick energy pick up as well. Drops of the oil can be added to bath water, in a small bowl of water to splash on your face or heated in some water on the stove for an aromatic effect.

- *When to contact the midwife: If you think the fatigue seems excessive or interferes with your daily life*

Headaches

The most common reason for headaches in pregnancy is lack of adequate food and fluid intake. Eating small meals throughout the day and drinking a glass of water every two or three hours can help eliminate many headaches. Stress and muscular strain can cause tension headaches. When a headache arises, have something to eat, drink, and then try lying down for a nap. Shoulder and neck massage can help. Spraying or taking Rescue Remedy tincture can help calm and de-stress. You can also try soaking your hands and feet in hot lemon water.

- *When to contact the midwife: If the headache is severe, persistent, accompanied by nausea, vomiting, weight loss, visual disturbances, or severe swelling*

Heartburn

Heartburn is usually caused by the effects of a hormone called progesterone. Progesterone relaxes smooth muscles and decreases digestion time. Later in pregnancy, the enlarging uterus displaces the stomach, which can also lead to heartburn. Eating smaller, more frequent meals and avoiding meals that are very cold, spicy, or full of fat can help. You may also try separating beverages from meals or eating a cultured milk product such as kefir before and after meals. If heartburn becomes a problem at bedtime, avoid food before bed and try sleeping with your head elevated. Earth Mama Heartburn tea or drinking plain club soda may offer relief of symptoms. You can also try Papaya enzyme tablets, liquid calcium-magnesium supplement (1 spoonful), comfrey-pepsin tablets or slippery elm capsules. Homeopathic remedies include Acidil, Capsicum, Causticum, or Lacticum Acidum.

- *When to contact the midwife: If these measures do not produce results*



Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are the abnormal dilation of veins internally or externally in or around the rectum. They are caused in pregnancy as the weight of the enlarged uterus begins to decrease blood flow return, by straining during bowel movements, or can occur as a result of pushing or bearing down in childbirth. Some women may have a predisposition to hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids can cause itchiness, tenderness, and they can bleed. Compresses can be used directly against the hemorrhoids, witch hazel extract or grated, raw potatoes can be used as or with a compress. Tucks pads are sold over the counter and can be used, but avoid Preparation H, another common over the counter remedy, as it contains mercury. Vitamin E capsules (400 IU or more) can be inserted into the anal canal at night before bed to help heal the tissues. Yellow Dock root tincture can be taken ½ dropperful orally 3 times a day to help with circulation. Homeopathic Hammamelis 30C can be helpful with calming flare-ups.

- *When to contact the midwife: When hemorrhoids cause sudden, moderate to severe pain, or they appear to be quite severe*

Insomnia

Many women have a hard time sleeping comfortably with a large belly, or are up to pee frequently through the night. Finding a comfortable sleeping position is key. Sleeping on your side and using a pillow under your belly for support as well as one in-between your knees and ankles can really make a difference. Sometimes, if another pillow isn't over-doing it, one tucked into the small of your back offers some needed support. You may notice better sleep being supported so well. Getting up to use the bathroom in the middle of the night is common in pregnancy, but many times hunger may be the underlying reason for waking. You could actually be hungry and not even realize it. To prevent hunger from waking you, try eating a protein snack before bed and keep a protein snack such as nuts, seeds, or cheese to snack on when you wake to use the restroom. If you have trouble falling asleep at night, try chamomile tea. You can add skullcap tincture, which is a natural sedative, up to 15 drops to tea, in water, or directly under your tongue. A cup of warm milk can be helpful for a few reasons. Calcium helps insomnia and your muscles to relax, warming the milk releases tryptophan, which will also help with sleep. Calcium can also be increased in your diet to help with sleep in general. A warm bath before bed with some lavender essential oil can help prepare your body for sleep too. For anxiety or restlessness, homeopathic Aconite 30C is effective in calming nervous tension or fears, but should only be used when the anxiety is occurring and not preventatively.

- *When to contact the midwife: When urination at night becomes as frequent as every 2 hours*

Itchy Skin

Skin itchiness happens in pregnancy as skin stretches to accommodate a growing body. Dry skin can cause itchiness and is quite common in winter months. The decrease in bowel function and the extra sweating that happens in pregnancy, together cause the skin to work harder to release toxins. The liver, which now has more to process, may also cause itchiness if it becomes overworked. Pregnancy is a time to take care of your skin. Clean using a mild natural soap, without additives or strong perfumes. It is helpful to use a loofah or soft body brush to exfoliate dead skin cells and encourage circulation before baths or showers. Drinking plenty of water and supplementing with a high-quality fish oil can help hydrate your skin from the inside. Using a natural lotion, oil or some cocoa butter



after bathing will replace moisture lost. Calendula oil can reduce itching and irritation and slippery elm bark or marshmallow root powder can be sprinkled in creases, for example under your breasts to reduce chafing or rashes.

- *When to contact the midwife: If the itching is persistent or gets progressively worse*

Leg Cramps

Leg cramps often times occur when there is a mineral deficiency. Minerals deficiencies most likely to cause leg cramps include, sodium, calcium, magnesium and potassium. Try to increase foods rich in these minerals in your diet to avoid leg cramps, such as: bananas, grapefruit, oranges, cottage cheese, yogurt, salmon, sardines, dark greens, seaweeds, soybeans, almonds, sesame seeds, and salt your food to taste. You can also supplement using calcium and magnesium in a 2 to 1 ratio (twice as much calcium as magnesium). When a cramp happens, try applying counter pressure by placing your flat foot on something solid like a wall or the floor, or point your toes upward towards your knee to relieve the cramp. Massage and heat while applying counter pressure as instructed or pointing toes upward can help. If varicose veins are present in the area, DO NOT massage.

- *When to contact the midwife: If the leg pain is persistent, or accompanied by local heat or swelling*

Morning Sickness/Nausea

Although nausea in pregnancy is commonly referred to as morning sickness, it happens anytime of the day and is not restricted to the morning hours. Generally nausea happens from 6-14 weeks of pregnancy, and is not always accompanied by vomiting. Nausea that continues beyond 14 weeks of pregnancy should be brought to your midwife's attention. Nausea can be very unpleasant, but it can be helpful to know that nausea by itself is not a dangerous condition, and many providers believe it is a sign of a healthy pregnancy. If vomiting accompanies the nausea it is very important to get plenty of rest, drink lots of fluids and to make your food or snacks nutritious, complex carbohydrates and protein to avoid dehydration and malnutrition. Simple steps can be taken to avoid nausea as much as possible, such as avoiding triggers including certain foods or smells. You can also try to eat small, frequent meals or snacks rather than large meals, keeping something in your tummy throughout the day and even snack at night when you get up to use the restroom. Avoid brushing teeth after eating, as this can easily cause a gag reflex and trigger vomiting. Stop all vitamin supplements. Ginger tea can offer relief, and is simple to make by steeping 1 teaspoon of freshly grated ginger with 1 cup of boiling water. This can be sipped on throughout the day and you can have up to two cups a day, alternatively capsules 6-50 daily. Eating crystallized ginger found at health food stores is another alternative. Vitamins of B-complex can help if the nausea is due to vitamin deficiency. Carbonated beverages such as ginger ale or carbonated water with lemon can be tried but remember to avoid sweetened beverages as sweets sometimes trigger nausea. The smell of lemons can be very helpful. Cut fresh lemons or use the essential oil on a cotton ball and sniff to help take the feeling away. Dandelion Root and Wild Yam tinctures and infusions can help, you can even combine the two, 30 drops each, as a tincture. Acupuncture and acupressure have been known to produce good results, some drug stores sell acupressure bands to help with seasickness that can work quite well.

- *When to contact the midwife: If vomiting seems excessive, continues past 14 weeks of pregnancy, or you suspect dehydration or malnutrition*



Nausea Triggers In Pregnancy Include: an empty stomach, hunger, low blood sugar, strong smells, hormonal surges, pregnancy related digestive changes, oily foods, sweet foods, vitamin or mineral deficiency, lack of exercise, fatigue, stress, or anxiety.

Nosebleeds

The increased blood volume in pregnancy and the softening effects of hormones make the small capillaries in the nose more likely to break open and bleed. Certain medications make nosebleeds more common as well as exposure to dry heat. Keeping vitamin C and bioflavonoids in your diet can help prevent nosebleeds. Also using a humidifier at night to make the air moist can help to alleviate nosebleeds at night. Should a nosebleed occur, direct pressure should be placed on the nose and tucking an ice cube under the upper lip to slow blood flow can help. Rarely will the nosebleed be so severe that it requires further treatment. Should the bleeding not respond to these measures, you can drink 1 tsp of cayenne pepper in a glass of water or capsules can be taken.

- *When to contact the midwife: If these measures do not stop the bleeding*

Pica

Occasionally women crave non-food substances during pregnancy, this is known as pica. Non-food substance craving can be clay, coffee grounds, ice, flour, baking soda, or sometimes things like paper. These cravings usually indicate dietary deficiencies of vitamins, minerals, or calories. Please mention any non-food cravings to your midwife as she can offer guidance and determine cause or need.

Round Ligament Pain

Round ligaments support the uterus and are located on the front and are on either side of the uterus. Round ligaments are made of smooth muscle and are attached to the uterus and expand as the uterus grows. Many women report pain from these ligaments in pregnancy as they are stretched or used. Often, women say they occur upon standing, though it can happen at any time. A good prevention method is to stand slowly, stretch the ligaments when possible by doing the pelvic tilt or yoga pose cat-cow, wearing a maternity belt, and supporting the uterus with a pillow when lying on your side. Bending toward the pain to ease the stretch and using heat (either applied or in a warm bath or shower) can offer relief when the pain occurs.

- *When to contact the midwife: If the pain is persistent or worsens, if the pain radiates upwards into the chest, if there are flu-like symptoms accompanying the pain*



Salivation (Ptyalism)

Ptyalism is excessive salivation or the inability to swallow saliva fast enough. This often occurs in conjunction with nausea, and will usually resolve and turn to normal after pregnancy. For this reason, it's good to treat the salivation and nausea in conjunction (see section on nausea for ideas). Many times women will have a family history of ptyalism in pregnancy. Salivary glands can become swollen and the tongue can become enlarged. Some dietary adjustments can be suggested such as increasing carbohydrates, limiting fats, and decreasing fluids as dehydration is usually not associated with this condition. Acupuncture would be a good suggestion, and chewing cinnamon flavored gum may help.

Sciatica

Sciatica is a form of severe back pain that radiates down the legs and happens as the growing baby and uterus place pressure on the sciatic nerve in your lower back. Good posture is key to preventing sciatic nerve discomfort. Avoid swaying your belly forward and slouching your shoulders. Stand up straight and tuck your tailbone under so the pelvis does not tilt forward. Follow the suggestions in the backache section of this handout. Swimming makes you weightless and allows time for your body to rest, and a warm bath can offer needed relief as well. St John's Wort tincture (half a dropper full every few hours) can be taken to reduce pain. St. John's Wort oil can be massaged into the area of pain, depending on the severity of the pain it can be used straight or diluted 1:6 parts (1 part St John's Wort to 6 parts) with olive oil or almond oil.

- *When to contact the midwife: If the pain is persistent and these measures do not produce pain relief, or if pain is accompanied by fever, chills, pain or burning with urination, or urinary frequency (more than usual)*

Shortness of Breath

Hormones in pregnancy cause changes to your respiratory system and red blood cells. Towards the end of pregnancy the diaphragm elevates up to 4 centimeters to accommodate the enlarging uterus. These changes in pregnancy can result in a woman experiencing shortness of breath. This is another reason to maintain good posture in pregnancy. Regulating your breathing may be helpful, yoga provides an opportunity to tune into and learn breath awareness.

- *When to contact the midwife: If shortness of breath is accompanied by fever, chest pain, pain or wheezing with breathing, fatigue, or signs of sickness*



Stretch Marks

Stretch marks commonly appear in the skin of the abdomen, thighs, breasts, and buttocks. They appear as the skin stretches to accommodate your growing pregnant body. Deeper layers of the skin tear or rupture and the top layer of the skin thins out, revealing pinkish blue and sometimes purple marks on the skin. As the marks heal and fade, they turn a silvery whitish color. These changes in your body are part of the passage into motherhood. Some contributing factors include the genetic predisposition (family trait) and amount of weight one gains in pregnancy. There is no absolute cure, but for those wanting to be proactive in avoiding stretch marks, they can try supplementing with vitamin E, and keeping the skin moisturized with cocoa butter, aloe vera, or another natural belly cream.

- *When to contact the midwife: If the marks seem infected or a bulge is noticed in or around the mark*

Varicosities

Varicosities or varicose veins occur in pregnancy due to impaired circulation as the enlarging uterus places pressure on pelvic veins and also the hormonal influences on vein walls, valves and surrounding muscles. They occur when the vein wall becomes prolapsed and dilates. Women who sit or stand frequently or who have a family tendency for varicose veins are more likely to see them in pregnancy. Varicose veins are usually found in legs and the vulva. To treat varicose veins you can elevate your legs, and put on support hose or Ace bandages wrapped around the effected area before rising in the morning. You can also wear a maternity belt to relieve pressure on the pelvic veins. Avoid long periods of standing and keep your legs uncrossed while sitting. Mild exercise helps circulation and should be done regularly. Kegel exercises promote circulation for varicose veins of the vulva. Vulvar varicosities should be treated as you would a hemorrhoid (please see hemorrhoid section of this handout). You can take vitamin E 600-800 units daily in the first and second trimesters, and up to 400 units in the third trimester. Please DO NOT massage varicose veins.

- *When to contact the midwife: if the varicose vein feels warm to the touch, there is a firm area in the vein, or if there is any redness or swelling around the vein*

Visual Disturbances

Hormonal and fluid balance sometimes effect vision in pregnancy. The cornea of the eye is mostly made up of water and increased cellular fluid in pregnancy makes the cornea become a bit thicker which can affect vision. Myopia or nearsightedness has a tendency to show up in pregnancy and in the third trimester tear production generally decreases.

- *When to contact the midwife: If symptoms worsen, are accompanied by headaches, upper chest pain, or swelling (edema)*



References

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