

# Common Discomforts of Pregnancy



A Guide to Understanding  
and Overcoming



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# General Pregnancy Health Information

Congratulations on your pregnancy! I hope you find this booklet informational and a resource you can use throughout your pregnancy. First, we will start with some topics that all pregnant women need to know about.

There is a lot to learn and decide about when you are pregnant. Doing your own research and talking to your midwife, friends and family can help you decide on your approach to these topics.

## *Air Travel*

Currently, there are no known risks for healthy moms. There are some conditions, such as fetal growth restriction and cardiac disease that, if you have them, you should avoid flying. Some airlines may require a note from your doctor or midwife stating that it is safe for you to fly. This may help you avoid delays on your day of travel and assist with convincing airport personnel that it is indeed okay for you to get on the plane. This may be especially true if you are further along in your pregnancy. Make sure to speak with your midwife if you have any travel plans and make sure that it is okay for you to fly.



## *Breastfeeding*

Breastfeeding is highly recommended for both moms and babies. There are many resources available if help is needed. Finding a lactation consultant, breastfeeding group, or a La Leche League before the end of your pregnancy is a good idea in case help beyond your midwife's knowledge is needed.



## *Caffeine*

Caffeine does cross the placenta which means the fetus is exposed to it in utero. It is not as easily and quickly metabolized by your baby as it is by you. 1-2 cups of coffee or 300mg a day is okay and is not going to cause miscarriage, fetal growth restriction or other anomalies.



## *Car Seats*

Car seats have to be used by all children up to certain ages and weights that vary by state. It is recommended that children under the age of 2 stay in a rear facing car seat. State laws about car seats can be found at

<http://www.iihs.org/laws/safetybeltuse.aspx>.

Finding a technician who can help with recommended car seats and how to install them can be found at <http://www.safekids.org>.

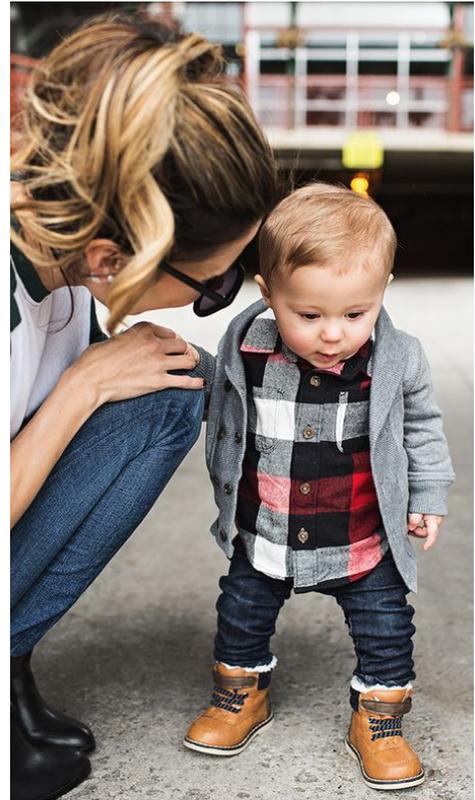
## *Mom's Seat Belt*

Seat belts should always be used in the car even during pregnancy. The lap belt should fit across your hips and below your uterus. The shoulder belt should be placed between the breasts and alongside your uterus. Remember, now you are protecting two people!

## *Circumcision*

Routine infant circumcision for all male infants is no longer recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. It is a cosmetic rather than a medical procedure.

Information about circumcision and keeping a baby boy intact can be found at [www.intactamerica.org](http://www.intactamerica.org). Research this issue and decide what is best for your family!



## *Exercise for Mom*

You should strive to get some form of exercise at least 3-5 days a week unless you have something that comes up in pregnancy that prevents you from it. Aerobics, light weights, yoga, pilates, walking and swimming are all great choices. Something to get your heart rate up! It will improve your cardiovascular fitness, help prevent lower back pain, reduce symptoms of depression and help with weight gain. Remember, this is a great time in your life to begin or continue healthy habits – you are benefiting two! Talk with your midwife before starting an exercise program if you have any questions or concerns.



## *Environmental Toxins*

There are certain environmental exposures that should be avoided by pregnant women. Lead paint, kitty litter, and mercury are big ones. Be mindful of paint fumes, having dental work done, and consumption of fish from mercury-tainted waters. The larger fish are going to be the biggest seafood culprits. These include shark, swordfish, king mackerel, some tuna fish and tilefish. These fish should be avoided or had on a limited basis in pregnancy.

Avoid processed meats (lunch meat, hot dogs, salami, sausages) with nitrates or nitrites in them. These are harmful preservatives.



## *Working & Pregnancy*

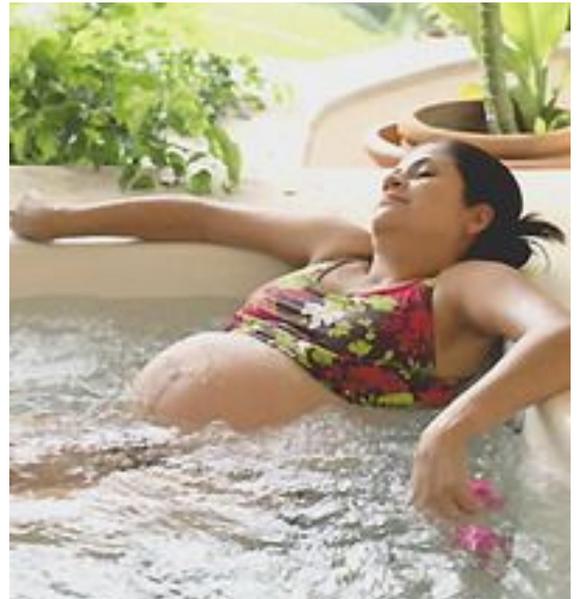
Working while pregnant is usually okay. Pregnant women who have physically intense jobs that require being on their feet for extended periods of time (waiting tables in a restaurant, cleaning or custodial work, retail store work, etc.) may struggle with this, especially in advanced pregnancy. If you need it, ask your midwife for a letter to give your employer stating your need to sit down and rest every half hour or hour as needed. This will help communicate to your employer that resting for you is a true physical need, not you using your pregnancy as an excuse to slack off.

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1964 protects pregnant women from being fired for being pregnant. Pregnancy discrimination should be reported to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission at <http://www.eeoc.gov/stats/enforcement.html>.

Maternity leave benefits can be obtained through your company's HR department. They usually consists of a combination of sick time, vacation, unpaid leave and short term disability. Laws and coverage will vary by state also. The Family Medical Leave Act mandates 12 weeks of unpaid leave in a 12-month period. Eligibility is for both parents who have worked at a company of at least 50 employees for at least a year.

## *Hot Tubs & Saunas*

There is an increased risk of up to 50% neural tube defects if a woman's core temperature rises; this includes a high fever, over 104. Saunas and hot tubs should be watched closely due to the risk of increasing temperature quickly. It only takes 10 minutes to increase your core temperature to more than 104 in water that is 104 and 15 minutes if the water is 102. Avoiding hot tubs and hot baths would be a good idea if you aren't able to keep the water under these temperatures.



## *Medications*

Be sure to discuss any medications that you are taking with your midwife. Over-the-counter NSAID medications should not be used during pregnancy. These include the popular “Three A’s” – Advil (also known as ibuprofen), Aspirin, and Aleve. If you must take a pain reliever, Tylenol is recommended for pregnancy. While a safer choice, even Tylenol has been linked to ADHD in children, and should not be used frequently.

Many of the common discomforts outlined in this booklet can be treated first with natural remedies, which we have included.

# *Ultrasounds*

Ultrasounds can be really fun and a great way to connect with your baby. But many mothers are now asking: Are they safe? No conclusive studies have been done on the safety of ultrasound to human babies. Some studies have been done with ultrasound on animals and some adverse affects have been shown. It is not yet conclusively known if these same risks can be transferred to human babies. Either way, it's a good idea to limit your baby's exposure to ultrasound, making sure that the reason for the ultrasound always outweighs any risks involved. Talk to your midwife about necessary times for ultrasound. Most midwives are not concerned about 1-2 ultrasounds during a pregnancy, particularly after your first trimester.

Sources: *Varney's Midwifery page 681, Understanding Diagnostic Tests in the Childbearing Year, pages 899-901.*



## *Conclusion*

I hope this information has been helpful in giving a basic overview to how your pregnancy may change different aspects of life. Your midwife will always be able to answer or help you find the answer to any questions you may have about your pregnancy and living your everyday adventures. Next we'll look at some common pregnancy discomforts and some helpful things you can do to alleviate them.



# Backache

## *Backache & Pregnancy*

During your pregnancy you may experience pain in your upper or lower back. This is a common occurrence in pregnancy, experienced by approximately 70% of pregnant women. Having a backache during pregnancy is generally caused by the increasing weight of your enlarging uterus as well as breast heaviness. The ligaments that support your uterus are relaxed and can put strain on your lower back. The problem can be compounded by weak abdominal muscles – particularly if you have had several children. Walking without rest periods, lots of bending over, and heavy lifting may also make the pain worse.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Try to lift things (your toddler, groceries, etc.) with your legs rather than your back. Spread your feet apart so you have a broad balance base.
- If you have persistent back pain, remember to rest periodically when doing active things – walking, gardening, shopping, or at your job (particularly if you have a job that requires you to stand for long periods of time). If needed, you may be able to get a letter from your midwife stating your need for periodic breaks to give to your employer at work.
- Make sure you are wearing comfortable, low-heeled, supportive shoes. This is an investment you can't afford to scrimp on!
- You can use hot or cold therapy on your back (ice packs, heating pad, warm baths) for relief.
- Seeing a chiropractor for regular adjustments can greatly help with your back pain, and also aligns your pelvis for birth. Make sure you find a chiropractor who is comfortable with and frequently helps pregnant women. Your midwife may have some good recommendations. Sometimes your insurance will cover these visits.

- Acupuncture is another possible tool in relieving back pain. Check with your midwife for a local acupuncture therapist.
- Massage therapy or frequent backrubs may help alleviate the pain.



- Make sure that you are wearing a comfortable and well-supporting bra – this will particularly help with upper back pain.
- At nighttime: make sure you have a supportive mattress. Also, experiment with putting pillows in different places for support and comfort.
- Exercising as you can may help to strengthen your core and alleviate pain. “Gentle” exercises such as swimming or yoga are great starting places. Pelvic tilts and rocks can help as well, and are great for positioning baby at the end of your pregnancy.

Source: *Varney’s Midwifery*, pages 692-693.





# Breast Tenderness

## *What You Can Do:*

- Wearing a correctly fitted and supportive bra may help you deal with the increase in weight and size. It is not uncommon to have to change bra sizes in pregnancy. You may have to change bra sizes a few times throughout the course of your pregnancy.
- Wearing a bra while sleeping may also prove beneficial.

## *Breast Tenderness & Pregnancy*

Pregnancy causes your breasts to change quite a bit especially due to the amount of hormones running through your body. Prolactin, hCG, and human placental lactogen or HPL are all hard at work while you are pregnant. The ductal system and glandular tissues of the breasts also change. These changes and an increase in weight and size may cause pain or tenderness. There is also an increase in blood flow and this will cause the blood vessels in the breast to be more apparent. Many women experience tingling or sensitivity of the nipples in addition to the breast tissue itself.

- Some sources say that avoiding caffeine can help prevent an increase in breast tenderness.

Sources: *Holistic Midwifery*, page 444, *Varney's Midwifery* page 687.





# Carpel Tunnel Syndrome

## *Carpel Tunnel Syndrome & Pregnancy*

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is extreme pain, tingling or stiffness in your wrist and fingers. Weight gain and swelling from pregnancy reduces the narrow passage for the nerve running from your forearm to your hand, sometimes causing this syndrome. Women who use regular, repetitive wrist movement when working (typing on a computer keyboard, knitting or crocheting, playing an instrument, etc.) may experience this more. This discomfort is usually resolved after birth, except in chronic cases.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Vitamin B6 can sometimes help relieve this discomfort. You can take 25 mg daily along with a B complex supplement (this may be present in your prenatal vitamin).
- Acupuncture may be helpful in treating this syndrome; acupuncture is beneficial for many different types of pain.
- If your carpal tunnel syndrome is severe, wearing wrist supports at night and while working at a keyboard or doing other wrist-intensive activities is recommended.
- Stabilize your wrist at night, making sure you are not sleeping with your head resting on your wrists or hands.

Source: *Holistic Midwifery*, page 1028-1029.





# Constipation

## *Constipation & Pregnancy*

Constipation is common, particularly in early pregnancy. Progesterone causes muscles in your body to relax, including the muscle of your large bowel, slowing down its activity. This allows your intestinal tract to absorb more nutrients and fluid for your body, but can also lead to constipation. The displacement of your colon by your enlarging uterus is also another factor.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Constipation is sometimes caused by a decrease in physical activity and exercise, particularly if you were active before. Look for ways to regularly be active, even if you have to find different types of exercise than you did previously, or do modified versions.
  - Fluid consumption is one of the most important things you can do to prevent constipation. Make sure you are drinking at least 64-100 ounces of water each day. Try adding citrus, using drinking straws, hydration apps or charts on the fridge to help you. Be sure to increase your water intake when drinking coffee or tea.
  - A diet high in fiber (think veggies!) can be very helpful. Leafy greens and celery are particularly great sources.
  - Eating prunes daily and consuming prune juice or black cherry juice are tried-and-true methods to combat constipation.
  - Stool softeners and glycerin suppositories are all safe for use in pregnancy, and can be used when other changes aren't helping. Stimulant laxatives should be avoided.
  - Avoid refined carbohydrates. A low fiber "typical American diet" can cause chronic constipation.
  - Drink a hot liquid immediately followed by a cold liquid. This will help stimulate the action of your colon to bring on a bowel movement.
- Sources: *Holistic Midwifery*, page 961-962, *Varney's Midwifery* page 697-688.



# Dyspareunia

## *Dyspareunia & Pregnancy*

You may be wondering what in the world this is? Dyspareunia is the medical term for vaginal pain during sexual activity. Your vagina is particularly sensitive due to normal increased blood flow and engorgement in pregnancy. Varicose veins in your vulva may also exacerbate this.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Have frank, open discussions with your partner about this, assuring him that he is not the problem (except in an abusive circumstance, please seek help in this situation).

Many new fathers are timid and concerned about hurting you or the baby during pregnancy. While you do want to work to alleviate your discomfort, you also want to maintain a sweet, sexual relationship that keeps intimacy and love between you both during this special time of pregnancy.

- Try different positions, seeking to alleviate pain caused from an enlarging abdomen or deep penetration. It's okay if it takes a little while to figure out what works for both of you.

- It may be helpful to obtain a book on the topic of intimacy during pregnancy. This can be used as a springboard to help you and your partner discuss sensitive issues.

One book that may be helpful is *Making Love During Pregnancy* by Elisabeth Bing & Libby Coleman.

Sources: *Varney's Midwifery* page 691-692,  
*Holistic Midwifery* page 692.



# Edema



## *Edema & Pregnancy*

Edema (swelling) in pregnancy is caused by normal reduced circulation and hormone levels affecting fluid retention. It mostly occurs in ankles and feet, and sometimes in the hands and face. Extreme swelling should be reported to your midwife (and will likely be noticed by her), but minor swelling, especially after long periods of being on your feet, is normal.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Elevating your legs and feet throughout the day or lying on your side can help.
- Compression stockings or hose can alleviate swollen legs and feet. Putting them on when getting out of bed or after a rest period can help keep the swelling down for a little while.
- Exercising regularly and avoiding long periods of sitting and standing can help by moving fluid and blood through and around your body.
- Insuring you have plenty of protein, fresh vegetables and lots of fluids in your diet can go a long way towards preventing swelling. Prevention before management is always the best course of action!

Sources: *Varney's Midwifery* page 693-694, *Heart & Hands*, page 47.





# Fatigue

## *Fatigue & Pregnancy*

Perhaps one of the most common complaints of pregnancy, fatigue is most often felt in the 1st and 3rd trimesters. Fatigue is common for a variety of pregnancy-related reasons, including increased energy requirements, weight gain, and hormone changes. Not sleeping well at night can also be a contributing factor. While sometimes discouraging, use fatigue as a reminder to slow down and take care of yourself. Fatigue often serves as a positive function in the first trimester to help a new mother rest and tune into the changing needs of her body.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Realize that what you are feeling is completely normal and experienced by many other pregnant women with you. Make this season of pregnancy one of taking extra-special care of yourself. Try to make time for naps, going to bed earlier or sleeping a little extra in the mornings. Take frequent rest periods and enjoy life at a little slower pace. It's okay if you don't get much done besides the basics. Spend the rest of your time taking care of yourself and your growing baby.
- Nutrition can be a factor in fatigue. Make sure your body is getting adequate protein and "healthy fuel" each day to support your energy needs. Eating a big variety of fruits and vegetables can give your body the vitamins and minerals it needs to operate.
- If you are feeling especially tired and "out of breath", talk with your midwife about evaluating your iron levels. Low iron can contribute to reduced oxygen travel to cells throughout your body, which will make anyone fatigued!
- If your fatigue is due to insomnia at night, daily exercise and relaxation techniques can help you sleep better. See the section on insomnia for more help on this.

Sources: *Varney's Midwifery* page 684-685, *Heart & Hands* page 46





# Headaches

## *Headaches & Pregnancy*

Minor headaches in pregnancy can be common. Extreme headaches should be reported to your midwife as a concern. Headaches in pregnancy can be caused by stress, lack of nutritional intake, and substances the body is not able to process (insecticides, pollution, sometimes coffee, chocolate or sugar).

## *What You Can Do:*

- Dehydration can be the cause of a headache. Make sure you are drinking plenty of water, 64-100 ounces a day.
- Peppermint oil rubbed on the temples and forehead can often be helpful in reducing a headache, as well as diffusing peppermint oil in your home. Peppermint essential oil can be purchased in small bottles, and also in convenient roller balls.
- Drinking herbal tea can also help with a headache. Hops, skullcap, and chamomile are good teas for this. The herbs can be purchased in tea bags or from online sources in bulk. Sweeten your tea with honey for an extra taste.
- Chiropractic care can also relieve headaches. Your midwife may be able to recommend a chiropractor who has experience and expertise in treating pregnant women.





- Massage and yoga can also help with headaches by releasing tension held in your body. Join a local yoga class or do simple yoga workouts found on YouTube or other online sources. Finding a good massage therapist that specializes in prenatal massage can be a great “extra help” during your pregnancy.

- Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) can also cause headaches. Eating smaller meals more frequently throughout the day can help combat this issue. During pregnancy your body may be metabolizing your food at a faster rate than normally, and your stomach has reduced space to hold food, especially in

late pregnancy. Frequent small meals can help this. Make sure that you have nutritious snacks on hand, not just carbs that are empty of nutrition.

Sources: *Heart & Hands*, page 47, *Holistic Midwifery*, page 1004.





# Heartburn

## *Heartburn & Pregnancy*

Heartburn is caused by the displacement of the stomach and intestines by the enlargement of the uterus. The hormones which cause the soft tissues to relax in preparation for birth also cause the muscle closing the esophagus off from the stomach to relax. It can feel like a burning sensation in the back of your throat or just behind your breastbone. 50% of women experience heartburn in pregnancy, and 80% of those experience heartburn in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Due to the slowing of digestion in pregnancy, try eating frequent but small meals.
- Reduce fat intake and avoid spicy foods.
- Eat at a leisurely pace, do not rush your meals.
- Limit foods in the evening, especially before lying down.
- Try taking a liquid calcium/magnesium supplement, 1 tsp. to 1 Tbsp. as needed.
- Elevate your head in bed by 10-30 degrees, this can be done with pillows.
- Suck slippery elm lozenges
- Chew raw almonds, raw papaya or papaya enzyme tablets.
- Drinking milk before, during and after eating food can help. Raw milk is best! A tablespoon of cream can also help by coating your stomach.



Sources: *Heart & Hands*, page 46 & 52, *Varney's Midwifery* page 691, *Holistic Midwifery*, page 964-965.



# Hemorrhoids

## *Hemorrhoids & Pregnancy*

Hemorrhoids are veins in your lower rectum or anus that have become swollen from being stretched very thin. This happens most often when constipated. Progesterone relaxes the vein walls in the rectum, predisposing women to getting hemorrhoids. The pregnant uterus also adds pressure to these veins, adding to the likelihood hemorrhoids developing. The cause of constipation should be determined, especially if the issue seems to be worsening, or other symptoms such as diarrhea, rectal bleeding, abdominal pain or changes in stool color are present.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Avoid straining during defecation. Putting your feet on a stool when using the toilet will help put your muscles in better alignment and alleviate rectal strain.
- Use herbal sitz baths or ice for comfort.
- Witch hazel compresses (Tucks) or Epsom salt compresses may help reduce the size of the hemorrhoids.
- 1/2 a dropperful taken orally 3 times daily of Yellow Dock root tincture gently supports the liver, which is directly related to hemorrhoids.
- Prolapsed hemorrhoids can be gently lubricated with olive oil or water-based lubricant and replaced inside. Replacement will help to minimize strangulation and prevent a blood clot from forming.
- Vitamin E capsules (400 IU or more) can be introduced into the anal canal at night to help heal the tissue.

Sources: *Varney's Midwifery*, page 693, *Holistic Midwifery*, pages 1059-1060.



# BEDTIME YOGA

for better sleep



## Insomnia

### *Insomnia & Pregnancy*

Insomnia is the inability to fall asleep. By the third trimester, up to 50% of women experience sleeplessness. There are a variety of reasons that insomnia can occur. Hormonal changes, physical discomforts and positioning problems, anxiety, emotional distress, frequent urination, back pain, heartburn and hip pain are all causes. Another cause of insomnia is hypoglycemia. Oftentimes, women do not realize that they are hungry or lacking nourishment. They may wake up in the middle of the night for various reasons and not be able to get back to sleep due to hunger.

### *What You Can Do:*

- Eat before bedtime and keep a high protein snack nearby.
- Take 1 to 10 drops of Skullcap tincture in hot water or directly under your tongue. Hops tincture or infusion can be used before bed after the 5<sup>th</sup> month.
- Support your belly with pillows, switch positions, and sleep propped up.
- Reduce stimulation before bedtime, including blue screens
- Avoid caffeine, sugar, alcohol and smoking.
- Exercise regularly, but not before bedtime. Yoga stretches before bed may help.

Sources: *Varney's Midwifery*, pages 694-695, *Holistic*

# Leg Cramps



## *Leg Cramps & Pregnancy*

About 25% to 50% of women experience leg cramps in pregnancy. While there is not a definitive cause for leg cramps, there are many potential causes. These include inadequate salt intake, excess calcium, anemia, pressure from the enlarged uterus on the pelvic blood vessels and impairment of circulation. Causes not related to pregnancy include electrolyte imbalances, excessive activity, and muscle or neurovascular disorders. What feels like cramps for some women are really clots deep in varicose veins. Keep this in mind when varicose veins are present, and do not massage the area until clots are ruled out.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Straighten out the affected leg, and dorsiflex the ankle.
- Walk regularly to help with leg circulation.
- While sleeping, elevate legs above the heart.
- Use a hot water bottle or heating pad and apply pressure.
- Supplement with magnesium, taking 350 mg at bedtime.
- Eat foods high that are high in magnesium. These include dark leafy greens, nuts, seeds, fish, beans, whole grains, avocados, yogurt, bananas, and dried fruits.

Sources: *Varney's Midwifery*, page 690,  
*Holistic Midwifery*, page 955.





# Leucorrhoea

## *Leucorrhoea & Pregnancy*

Leucorrhoea is an excess of thick or thin vaginal mucus discharge. It can increase with the length of pregnancy and is most common in the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester. Leucorrhoea may be attributed to the cervical glands' overproduction of mucus for the cervical mucus plug. It is painless, but if swelling, discomfort or an increase in discharge occurs, talk to your midwife.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Avoid vaginal douches, feminine hygiene sprays, bath bubbles, oils, and salts.
- Bathe regularly and clean the perineum and vaginal areas with water or mild, unscented soap.
- Frequently change unscented panty-liners and cotton underwear.

Sources: *Holistic Midwifery*, page 1066, *Varney's Midwifery*, page 691-692.





# Nausea & Vomiting

## *Nausea and Vomiting in Pregnancy*

Nausea and vomiting in pregnancy (NVP) is experienced by as many as 80% of pregnant women. It is most common during the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester, the onset being around 5-6 weeks and lasting until 14-16 weeks sometimes. Some women will experience NVP beyond 20 weeks, and women carrying twins often experience longer and more severe sickness. NVP is primarily due to elevated levels of hCG and estrogen, and is most likely to arise when the stomach is empty. Stress or psychological distress can also be a trigger of NVP, so emotional support and stress reduction is very important.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Eat small but frequent meals.
- Eat crackers or plain yogurt upon waking.
- Drink ginger or raspberry leaf tea. Take ground ginger capsules with small meals if nausea progresses to vomiting.
- Take 50 mg of vitamin B6 at bedtime and midday.
- Avoid brushing your teeth directly after waking up or eating to avoid stimulating your gag reflex.
- Avoid eating or preparing foods with strong or offensive odors.
- Try acupressure wristbands, acupuncture or hypnosis.
- Suck on a hard candy or a mint periodically between meals.
- Get adequate rest and sleep.
- Decrease unhealthy fats in your diet.
- Avoid overfilling your stomach.



Sources: *Varney's Midwifery*, pages 685-686, *Heart & Hands*, pages 46 & 52



# Pruritis Gravidarum

## *What You Can Do:*

### *Pruritis Gravidarum in Pregnancy*

Pruritus is skin itchiness. Pruritis gravidarum is extreme itchiness that occurs only in pregnancy and is due to the higher levels of estrogen and progesterone in the body which may interfere with the liver's ability to excrete bile salts. This may result in an obstructed flow of bile. This occurs in about 2-3% of pregnant women. It is most likely to happen in the third trimester and usually starts with severe general itching. A rash may appear with itchiness on the abdomen. This problem usually goes away after delivery once the liver is able to appropriately circulate bile salts.

- Supporting your liver will help bring relief of symptoms. Ask your midwife for recommendations on where to obtain different natural remedies for liver support.
- One liver supporting herb is dandelion root or yellow dock root. It can be taken in tincture form to help cleanse the liver and allow it function properly. One dropper full once or twice daily is recommended. Teas are also recommended.
- Eating liver cleansing foods such as beets, dark greens, lemon juice and olive oil is advised.
- Eating foods rich in choline such as egg yolk, brewer's yeast and wheat germ may also help.
- Plain yogurt applied to the skin may also help relieve the itching along with taking an oatmeal bath.

Sources: *Heart & Hands*, pages 46-47, *Holistic Midwifery*, page 1026 & 1045





# Round Ligament Pain

## What You Can Do:

- Seeing a chiropractor that is certified in

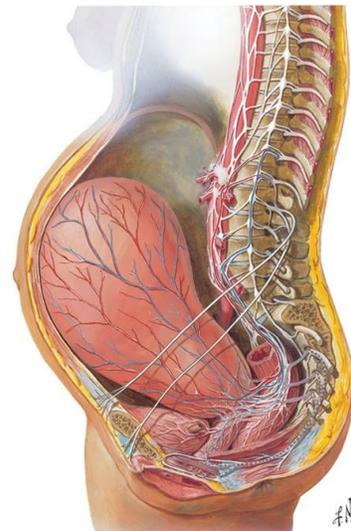
treating pregnant women can really help.

- Using heat on the area can help alleviate symptoms.
- Pelvic tilt exercises are recommended. To do this, kneel on all fours. While down, rock your hips back and forth and up and down.
- Wearing some sort of support wrap or girdle around your back and abdomen will support the weight of the uterus giving your round ligaments a break.
- Try laying in the side-lying relaxation position where you lay on your side and cross your top leg over your bottom leg which is straight.
- Massaging the sore area with coconut oil may also help.
- St. John's Wort tincture can be used to relieve spasms and a dose of 20 drops of the tincture taken when symptoms present themselves may be helpful.

Sources: *Varney's Midwifery*, page 690, *Heart & Hands*, page 46, *Holistic Midwifery*, page 953.

## Round Ligament Pain in Pregnancy

Round ligament pain is a very common complaint from pregnant women. As the uterus grows, women tend to feel aches and pains or sensitivity while sitting or walking. The uterus is held up by ligaments on either side of the uterus. They are mostly smooth muscle, just like what makes up the uterus! These ligaments are stretched throughout pregnancy due to the increasing size and weight of the uterus. As the uterus gets bigger and rises up into the abdomen, these ligaments have to grow. The pressure of the growing uterus causes the round ligaments to stretch, causing aches, pulling and pain in some women.



# Sciatica Soothers



# Sciatica

## *Sciatica in Pregnancy*

The sciatic nerve is the largest nerve in the body. Sciatica is pain that starts in the pelvis, through the buttocks, hips and lower extremities. This pain is due to pressure that is put on the sciatic nerve. The pelvis moves and loosens during pregnancy due to hormonal changes. Pregnancy can also exacerbate this pain due to the growth of your baby and uterus.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Resting in a side lying position on the opposite side of the affected leg can help release the pressure and give some relief.
- The use of heating packs, ice or some sort of belly support may also be beneficial.
- Yoga, getting in the hands and knees position, and stretches that target the hips, hamstrings and gluteal muscles can help decrease the severity of symptoms.
- Seeing a chiropractor that is certified and experienced in working with pregnant women will offer relief too. Ask your midwife who she recommends in the area. Not all chiropractors know how to work on pregnant women.
- As always, moderate exercise such as swimming or walking on a regular basis can greatly reduce the pressure that is put on the sciatic nerve during pregnancy.
- Taking 5-20 drops of St. John's Wort tincture when pain occurs may offer relief to some women.

Sources: *Varney's Midwifery*, page 693, *Heart & Hands*, page 52, *Holistic Midwifery*, page 1027-1028.



# Supine Hypotensive Syndrome

## *Supine Hypotensive Syndrome in Pregnancy*

Supine hypotensive syndrome can cause you to feel light headed and dizzy. It occurs when you are laying down and the weight of your uterus and unborn baby puts pressure on your inferior vena cava and other veins. The blood flow return from the lower half of the body is constricted and it causes the amount of blood going to your heart to slow therefore decreasing your cardiac output. The weight of the uterus compresses on the aorta which changes the arterial pressure in the body. It is not uncommon to faint or to feel like you are going to do so.

## *What You Can Do:*

- Avoiding positions that put you on your back is advised
- If you must be on your back, such as during an examination, limit the time and if you feel lightheaded let your midwife know.
- Laying on your side or completely sitting up will immediately alleviate symptoms.
- Also, talking to your midwife and getting reassurance that it is something that can happen in pregnancy can help ease your mind and allow you to not get nervous or concerned if it does happen.

Source: *Varney's Midwifery*, page 694-695





# Varicosities

## *What You Can Do:*

- 600 units of Vitamin E per day can be beneficial.

### *Varicosities in Pregnancy*

Varicose veins are enlarged blood vessels. They are the most common vascular issue that arises in pregnancy. Varicose veins can occur on the legs or the vulva. High levels of progesterone relax the smooth muscle that affects your body's ability to return blood to other parts of your body. There is major expansion of blood volume in pregnancy. This causes increased pressure on the veins in your lower extremities and also impairs circulation of blood. The extra pressure causes the veins to become enlarged and overfilled with blood. As the uterus gets bigger it puts pressure on the pelvic veins when a woman is sitting or standing and puts pressure on the inferior vena cava when upright. Women with a family history of varicose veins may be at a higher risk to developing them.

- The use of compression socks has also been proven to help.
- Wearing an abdominal support brace might provide some relief.
- Take Vitamin C with bioflavonoids. A dosage of at least 500mg is recommended daily. Increasing fruits and vegetables high in Vitamin C may also be beneficial.
- Witch Hazel bark infusion can be put on cloths and applied to veins. To make, take one ounce of witch hazel bark and put in 1 pint of boiling water. Steep for 10 hours.





- Try drinking a nettle infusion (1-2 cups daily) or using nettle capsules (3 daily). Nettle is a nutritive herb that helps restore the renal and vascular systems.
- Making sure you are drinking plenty of fluids to avoid constipation which can cause straining.
- Hawthorne Berry extract is recommended; ¼ teaspoon 2-3 times daily.
- Alternating hot and cold moist towels daily should help bring some relief. Use the hot towels for 5 minutes and then use the cold towel for one minute.

- Avoid lifting heavy things, toddlers and other children included!
- Avoid sitting for extended periods of time. Stimulate circulation with exercise or elevating the legs above the heart.

Sources: *Holistic Midwifery*, page 1057-1058, *Heart & Hands* page 47, *Varney's Midwifery*, page 694.



# Sources & Bibliography

The information compiled in this booklet has been pulled from several reputable midwifery education sources, including nursing and midwifery textbooks. To document these sources, we have included a bibliography here.

Davis, E. (2012). *Heart & Hands* (5th Edition ed.). New York, NY, USA: Ten Speed Press.

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Varney, H. (2015). *Varney's Midwifery* (5th Edition ed.). Burlington, MA, USA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.

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Much of the information and comfort measures found here have been things I have used and seen help the clients under my care. I hope they will be helpful to you as well!

