

How Your Body Changes

The first trimester: A time of invisible transformation

Most discussions of pregnancy divide it into three equal parts, or trimesters. These divisions are arbitrary. Important events in fetal development occur throughout pregnancy. Nothing in particular makes the last day of week 12 different from the first day of week 13. Breaking pregnancy down into three stages, however, forms a convenient framework for thinking about the process.

We use fetal age, in weeks, to more precisely signify duration of pregnancy. Even the number of weeks' gestation we calculate, though, isn't your baby's exact age. We date pregnancy from the first day of your last menstrual period rather than the date of conception.

During the first trimester major changes occur within your body, and you'll experience these changes in your own individual way. For example, some women sense a change shortly after they conceive, while others may not be convinced that they're pregnant even after a positive pregnancy test and confirmation by their doctor. A large majority of women feel fatigue, along with nausea and breast tenderness, from quite early in the pregnancy and so are sure that something is different. Still others don't notice many changes at all and have pregnancies that are progressing normally.

Although the physical changes of early pregnancy may make you uncomfortable, they almost never endanger either your health or that of your baby. Each pregnancy is unique, so you may experience many, some or none of the changes, signs and symptoms described here. Knowing how early pregnancy affects your body and causes particular signs and symptoms will help you take better care of yourself.

Month One

Your Body

Your breasts now begin to feel tender and tingly. You may feel nausea ("morning sickness") at any time of the day. Most women are more tired than usual in early pregnancy. That's because the body has lots of adjustments to make. During the first weeks after conception, your body begins to produce more blood to carry nutrients to the fetus. Your heart increases its work to accommodate this increased blood flow, and your pulse rate increases by as much as 10 to 15 beats a minute. Your body also changes the way it uses water, protein, carbohydrate and fat. The combination of these major changes contributes to the fatigue you may feel.



At the same time, you're dealing with a major life change. Whether your pregnancy was planned or unplanned, you may have conflicting feelings about it. Even if you're overjoyed, there may be added emotional stresses. You may worry about the baby's health or your own or your partner's adjustment to parenthood. Potential problems with work and finances may also loom large in your thoughts. Such anxieties aren't unique to first-time mothers. A woman who already has two thriving children may worry just as much as a woman who has never cared for an infant. It's important to recognize that these concerns can play a part in how you feel physically.

Your Lifestyle

Try to get the rest you need. After the birth of your baby, your lifestyle is sure to change, and there are adjustments you should make even now. In addition to eating well and avoiding the harmful effects of smoking and alcohol, you need to find ways to feel as well-rested as possible.

Take naps when you can during the day. At work, find time to rest comfortably with your feet up, which can renew your energy. If you can't nap during the day, maybe you can do so right after work, before dinner or evening activities.

Take advantage of your partner or other children, getting their help as much as possible. Also, cut down on social events if they're wearing you out. Those who care about you will understand and will be happy to make allowances for you. Ask for the support and understanding that you need during this time, keeping in mind that you will almost certainly have more stamina in later pregnancy.

If you need to go to bed at 6:30 or 7 p.m. to feel rested, do it. It may also help if you avoid drinking fluids for a few hours before bedtime so that you won't have to get up as frequently during the night to empty your bladder.

Check with your midwife before taking any medicines. For the first 3 months of your pregnancy, avoid hot tubs and other activities that can raise your body temperature.

Your Baby

By the end of this month your baby has grown from about ¼ to 1 inch long. Brain and nervous system are forming. Heart and lungs are beginning to form. Tiny spots for ears, eyes and nose are appearing.

Eating Well

Eating for two means eating well, not more. Be sure to eat good foods for you and your baby. Include snacks that are good for you like peanut butter, cheese, fruits and vegetables. If you are not able to drink milk or eat milk products, talk to your midwife about getting enough calcium. Drink plenty of water each day to help you feel your best. Eating a balanced diet is particularly important when you're pregnant. The fatigue that is natural in early pregnancy can be aggravated if you're not getting enough iron or protein.

Questions to Ask

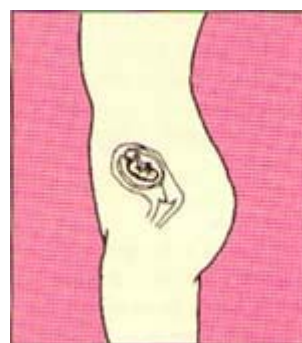
1. What types of lab tests are being done and what are the results?
2. What are some of the things that can cause my baby harm?

Month Two

Your Body

Your vaginal discharge becomes thicker, whiter, and stickier.

You may be experiencing breast tenderness. The increased production of the hormones estrogen and progesterone is the primary reason for the changes in a pregnant woman's breasts. After only a few weeks of gestation, you may notice tingling sensations in your breasts, and they may feel heavy, tender and sore. A good support bra can help alleviate breast soreness. Try a maternity bra or a larger-sized athletic bra. They tend to be breathable and comfortable. If you have large breasts that make you uncomfortable at night, you might try wearing a bra while you're sleeping, too.



You may experience varicose veins or hemorrhoids during your pregnancy. Pressure on the large veins behind the uterus causes the blood to slow in its return to the heart. This can lead to varicose veins in the legs and hemorrhoids (varicose veins in the vagina or around the anus). Varicose veins look like swollen veins raised above the surface of the skin. They can be twisted or bulging, and are dark purple or blue in color. They are found most often on the backs of the calves or on the inside of the leg, anywhere from the groin to the ankle. You can try to prevent varicose veins during pregnancy by:

- Avoiding tight knee-highs or garters.
- Sitting with your legs and feet raised when possible. If you work at a desk, you can prop your feet up on a footstool, box or several books. Or when relaxing at home, keep your feet up on a footstool, some pillows on the couch, or another chair.

Your Lifestyle

Don't be surprised if you have emotional up and downs...this is normal. These feelings will pass. Rest often and take it easy.

You may still be suffering from nausea and vomiting, one theory about this is that it is due to hormone changes produced by the placenta and the fetus. Changes in your gastrointestinal system also may play a role — your stomach empties more slowly under the influence of the hormones of pregnancy. Nausea and vomiting may also be worsened by emotional stress and fatigue.

Even though it's commonly called morning sickness, the nausea and vomiting in early pregnancy can occur any time of day. Morning sickness affects up to 70 percent of pregnant women. It can be more severe in a first pregnancy, in young women, in women carrying multiple fetuses or in women with other medical conditions. Usually it begins around four to eight weeks of gestation and subsides by 14 to 16 weeks. Some women have nausea and vomiting beyond the first trimester, and a few have it throughout their pregnancy. In rare instances, women have morning sickness so severe that they can't maintain proper nutrition and fluids or gain enough weight. Medical attention is

essential in these instances.

Your Baby

By the end of the second month, your baby's arms and legs have begun to form. All major internal organs are developing and facial features are becoming more defined. Your baby is about two inches long.

Eating Well

Modify your eating habits. Try eating small, frequent meals throughout the day and drinking less fluid at mealtime. The idea behind these measures is to avoid having your stomach completely empty or completely full, either of which can increase nausea.

Eat morning snacks. If nausea is worse when you first wake up, try nibbling on soda crackers or sipping weak tea before you get out of bed. Rise slowly, allowing a little time after eating before you get up.

Rest. The fatigue that is so common in early pregnancy can also contribute to nausea. Additional sleep each night may help.

Avoid unpleasant smells and foods. Many women find certain smells or foods unpleasant when they're pregnant, even if they had no such reactions before. Whenever possible, try to avoid the foods or smells that seem to make your nausea worse.

Other possible remedies. It may be possible to alleviate nausea with over-the-counter medications. Ask your doctor which ones may be suitable for you. Other remedies include sucking on ice cubes or lemons, chewing gum, or eating or drinking things that contain ginger — such as ginger tea, ginger ale, ginger candies and ginger snaps. Vitamin B-6 also has been proposed as a remedy.

Questions to Ask

1. How long will I have morning sickness?

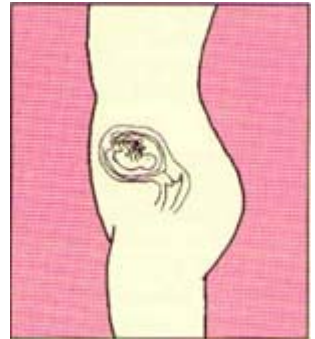
Month Three

Your Body

Your appetite may increase as your nausea decreases. You may sweat more easily than usual. You may have headaches and dizziness. You may have the feeling that you need to urinate more frequently. You may have energy by the end of this month.

Your Lifestyle

In the first trimester, the increasing size of your uterus may cause you to feel the need to urinate more often. You may also leak urine when sneezing, coughing or laughing. This is due to the enlarging uterus pressing on your bladder, which lies directly in front of and slightly under the uterus during your first few months of pregnancy. You may find that if you avoid drinking for a few hours before bedtime you will get up less often — and sleep better — throughout the night. It's not a good idea, though, to otherwise restrict your fluid intake during pregnancy.



Urinate whenever you feel the need to. Holding in your urine can make it difficult to empty your bladder completely when you do get to the bathroom. Incomplete emptying of your bladder may, in turn, lead to a urinary tract infection. Leaning forward while you urinate will help you empty your bladder more fully. Completely emptying your bladder may have the added benefit of cutting down on how often you need to urinate. If you leak urine throughout the day, wearing unscented panty liners will make you more comfortable.

Occasional headaches trouble many women in early pregnancy. The cause is uncertain, but like many other discomforts of the first trimester, changes in your hormone levels and blood volume may be factors. Other possible causes are stress and fatigue. If you suddenly eliminated or cut down on caffeine intake after you learned you were pregnant, this may also cause headaches for a few days.

Dizziness during pregnancy can result from circulatory changes. Stress, fatigue and hunger also cause dizziness or faintness. A more serious but rare cause may be an ectopic pregnancy, especially if dizziness is severe and occurs with abdominal pain or vaginal bleeding. For this reason, it's always a good idea to tell your midwife about this symptom.

Sinus headaches can be soothed by applying warm compresses to the front and sides of your face and around your nose, eyes and temples. A tension headache may be relieved by applying a cold compress to the back of your neck.

Relaxation exercises can help alleviate headaches as well as give you a greater overall sense of well-being. These exercises may consist of simply closing your eyes and imagining a calm, peaceful scene. Eating well and getting enough rest and exercise are important, too.

Although easier said than done, minimizing stresses in your life will help you get through the first trimester as well as the rest of your pregnancy. Some sources of stress, of course, can't be avoided. The key, then, is to improve your coping skills. If you are under more stress than you feel you can handle, talk with a therapist or counselor, even if only on a one-time basis, to get advice and ideas.

Do not use over-the-counter medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others) or naproxen sodium (Aleve). Acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) is a better choice during pregnancy.

To prevent mild, occasional dizziness, move slowly as you get up from lying or sitting down. Try to keep your blood sugar level on an even keel by munching on snacks such as dried or fresh fruit, whole-wheat bread, crackers or low-fat yogurt. If you're behind the wheel and you start to feel dizzy, stop driving. If you're standing when dizziness hits, sit or lie down to avoid injury in case the symptom worsens.

Your Baby

During this month, baby's fingers, toes, ears and eyelids are formed. Your baby now moves about as he grows rapidly. He now weighs about one ounce and is about three inches long.

Eating Well

Make sure each day to eat meals that give you plenty of the vitamins and minerals you and your baby need. Drink eight 10-ounce glasses of water, milk or juice a day. If you are constipated, eat an extra helping of raw fruits or vegetables, whole grain (dark) bread or bran cereal. Drink water often. Don't take aspirin or motrin.

Questions to Ask

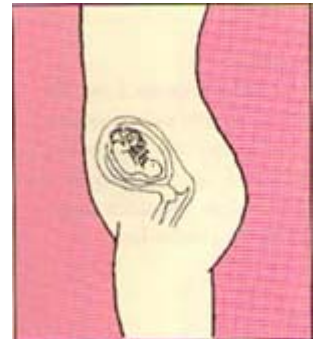
1. When will I feel the baby move? What will it feel like?
2. Will I have an ultrasound? What will it show on my baby?
3. What is an MSAFP blood test? What will it tell me about my baby?

Month Four

Your Body

You are less tired now. You may be hungry more often. Cravings for certain foods may start and continue throughout your pregnancy. Some women eat things like clay or starch when they are pregnant. If you eat non-food things, talk to your midwife.

As your uterus and abdomen expand, you might feel pains in your abdomen, groin area, or thighs. You also can feel backaches or aching near your pelvic bone from the pressure of the baby's head, your increased weight, and the loosening joints in these areas. Lying down, resting, or applying heat can help resolve some of these aches and pains.



You might have heard stories from family members or friends about the dreaded stretch marks from pregnancy. Stretch marks are red, pink, or purple streaks in the skin, usually over the thighs, buttocks, abdomen, and breasts. They are scars caused by the stretching of the skin, and usually appear in the second half of pregnancy. Only about half of all pregnant women get stretch marks though. They can start out as pink, reddish brown, or dark brown streaks, depending on your skin color. While creams and lotions can keep your skin well moisturized, they do not prevent stretch marks from forming. Most stretch marks fade after delivery to very light lines.

Besides stretch marks, you might notice other skin changes in the second half of your pregnancy. You might notice that your nipples are darker than before becoming pregnant, or that you have a dark line on your skin that runs down your abdomen from your belly button to your pubic hairline, called the *linea nigra*. You also might have blotchy brown pigmentations on your forehead, nose or cheeks. These skin changes are called *melasma* or *chloasma*. They are more common in darker-skinned women. These skin changes are caused by pregnancy hormones, and most of them will also fade or disappear after delivery.

Your Lifestyle

Fears and worries are natural as you prepare to be a mother. Learn as much as you can about childbirth and being a parent. You can read books and magazines, take classes or talk to parents of young children. The more you know

about what to expect, the less afraid you'll be.

Your Baby

By the fourth month, all of baby's organs are completely developed and blood vessels, bones, nerves and muscles are growing. The baby is becoming more active and the heartbeat can be heard. By the end of this month he may weigh $\frac{1}{4}$ pound or more and be six to eight inches long.

Eating Well

Your need for iron increases as your blood supply increases to nourish you and your baby. To get enough iron, eat meats, green leafy vegetables like spinach or turnip greens, dried fruits and beans (like raisins and black-eyed peas) and whole grain breads and cereals. Be sure to wash fresh fruit and vegetables to safeguard against harmful chemicals. Iodized salt in moderate amounts is okay. Remember to drink lots of water!

Questions to Ask

1. Am I gaining the right amount of weight?
2. What are the danger signs in pregnancy?

Month Five

Your Body

Your breasts continue to grow larger; they may get softer and the veins will start to show. Constipation may become a problem now and may continue through the end of pregnancy. As your baby gets bigger inside your body, there will be increased pressure on all of your organs, including your lungs. You might begin to notice that you are short of breath or might not be able to catch your breath. Try taking deep, long breaths and try to maintain good posture so your lungs have room to expand. You might be able to breathe more freely at night by using an extra pillow or by sleeping on your side.



If you sleep on your left side, you will relieve pressure on major blood vessels that supply oxygen and nutrients to the fetus. If you have high blood pressure, it is even more important to be on your left side when you are lying down. Tingling and numbness of the fingers and a feeling of swelling in the hands are common during pregnancy. These symptoms are due to swelling of tissues in the narrow passages in your wrists, and they should disappear after you deliver your baby. It also is common to feel itchy as your pregnancy progresses. Pregnancy hormones and your stretching skin, especially over your abdomen, probably are to blame for most of your discomfort. About 20 percent of all pregnant women have some kind of itching. And many pregnant women also get red and itchy palms and soles of their feet. Only in rare cases do pregnant women develop a condition called *cholestasis of pregnancy*, which is itching along with nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, jaundice and fatigue. This condition is a sign of a serious liver problem. In general, itching most often goes away after delivery. In the meantime, you can relieve itching with moisturizers. You can also use only gentle soaps, and avoid hot showers or baths that can dry your skin. Try not to get over-heated since heat rash can make the itching worse.

Your Lifestyle

In this month you cross the halfway mark to your baby's birth. You are getting bigger as the baby grows. You may have some feelings from time to time of not being able to cope; this can happen almost anytime during pregnancy. Go to the library and find books on parenting. If you have other children, talk to them about the new baby. Remember to wear your seat belt in the car.

Your Baby

By the end of the fifth month, you should begin to feel your baby move. The baby now weighs about one pound and is about 12 inches long. Your baby has developed a regular pattern of sleeping, kicking, turning and sucking. Start thinking about a name for your baby.

Eating Well

You need more protein during pregnancy, so eat foods that will give your body the protein it needs to nourish you and your growing baby. Good protein sources are fish, poultry, lean meat, yogurt, peanut butter, beans, milk peas and eggs.

Questions to Ask

1. What can you tell me about breastfeeding?
2. Is my weight gain normal?

Warning Signs of Preterm Labor

Signs of labor before the 37th week of pregnancy (preterm labor) could mean your baby is being born too early. If your baby is born too early, it runs the risk of serious problems.

Call your midwife at once or go to the emergency room if the following warning signs occur:

- Uterus or womb tightens, or gets hard every 10 minutes or more often (may be painless and feel like womb is tightening or the baby is "balling up")
- Menstrual-like cramps felt in lower abdomen; may come and go or be constant
- Low dull backache felt below the waist: may come and go or be constant
- Pressure that feels like baby is pushing down: pressure comes and goes
- Stomach cramping with or without diarrhea
- Vaginal discharge increases or changes into watery, or light bloody discharge
- Bladder or kidney infection

Month Six

You may have some heartburn, especially if you eat heavy, greasy or spicy foods. Your sex drive may increase or decrease; it may change from week to week. You look healthy----there is a special glow to your skin and a sparkle in your eyes.

Your Lifestyle

To avoid swelling, be careful about being on your feet too much. Your belly button may poke out, but it will go back in after your baby is born. To help you sleep better, lie on your side and put a pillow under your stomach and one between your legs. Wear low-heeled shoes, put your feet up often and stand straight to give your back help it needs. If you will go back to school or work after your baby is born, start now to find a good sitter or a day care center/home for your child.

Call 1-800-445-6175 to learn about breastfeeding your baby.

Your Baby

By the sixth month, your baby is 12 to 14 inches long and weighs one and one-half to two pounds. Your baby now moves around a lot, can open and close his eyes, and responds to noise.

Eating Well

Eat low fat foods like sherbet and crackers. Avoid spicy foods and don't lie down right after eating.

Question to Ask

1. What are false labor contractions?
2. Why am I getting tested for diabetes in pregnancy? How will I know if I have it?

Month Seven

Your Body

Your weight may increase faster than you expect; this month begins the period of greatest growth for your baby. You may begin to be aware of a loosening in the pelvic bones when you walk.

Your Lifestyle

Your due date is getting closer, and you are probably getting excited as you think about your new baby. This is a good time to begin gathering the items you will need to care for your baby. Be sure your baby will have a comfortable place to sleep, diapers, clothes, blankets, and other needs.

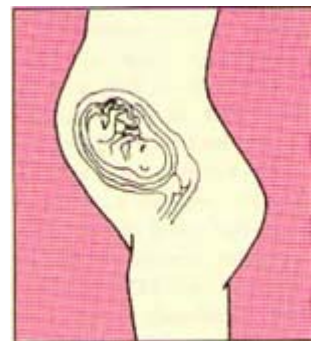
You might begin to experience more discomfort from hemorrhoids now from the increased pressure of your growing baby on the veins in your rectum. You might also be constipated, which makes hemorrhoids worse because you might strain for a bowel movement. Try to avoid hemorrhoids by drinking lots of fluids and eating plenty of whole grains, raw or cooked leafy green vegetables, and fruits. Try not to strain for bowel movements, and always talk with your health care provider before taking a laxative. Find a pediatrician. Your county health unit is an option.

Your Baby

By the end of the seventh month, your baby is 16 inches long and weighs about two and one-half pounds to three pounds.

Eating Well

In the last months of pregnancy, your baby grows very fast. Calcium is very important to help your baby have strong bones and teeth. Good sources of calcium include cheese, milk, collards and sardines. Don't forget to keep taking your vitamins or iron pills.



Questions to Ask

1. If I become anemic or have low iron, what effects can it have on my pregnancy?
2. If I am Rh negative blood type, how will the Rhogam shot help?
3. What supplies should I have for a homebirth?

Month Eight

Your Body

Your breasts have most likely increased in size and fullness as your pregnancy has advanced. As you near the end of your pregnancy, hormones in your body cause your breasts to increase even more in size, to prepare for breastfeeding. Your breasts can feel full and heavy, and they might be tender or uncomfortable. Wearing a well-fitting maternity or nursing bra will help you be more comfortable, because these types of bras offer extra support. Some pregnant women begin to leak colostrum in the third trimester. Colostrum is the first milk that your breasts produce for your baby. It is a thick, yellowish fluid that contains antibodies that protect new babies from infections. If leaking becomes a problem for you, you can purchase disposable or cloth nursing pads (that you can use when nursing your newborn) to place inside your bra.



Now and after delivery, it is a good idea to only wash your nipples with water instead of soap. Soap might cause the skin of your nipples to become dry, irritated and crack. If you do have skin cracks, which can be sore and painful, use a heavier cream that contains lanolin for extra moisture.

Your Lifestyle

Rest as much as possible. Wear flat or low-heeled shoes.

Your Baby

By the end of the month, your baby will be about 18 inches long and weigh between four and six pounds. Your baby has regular patterns of sleep and quiet time.

Eating Well

As your baby grows, you may not feel like eating much. Eat smaller, lighter meals. Try to eat calcium-rich foods, food with protein, fruits, vegetables, plus whole grain bread and cereals each day. Drink lots of water each day to help you feel your best.

Questions to Ask

1. What is pregnancy induced hypertension (preeclampsia)? How will I know if I have it? What happens to my baby?
2. What are my birth control options?
3. What are fetal movement counts? When do I start doing them?

Month Nine

Your Body

Your abdomen may look lopsided as your baby moves arms and legs or shifts position. You tire easily and often feel drowsy.

Your Lifestyle

As your due date gets closer; you may have headaches as well as constipation. Try to rest as much as possible and drink water throughout the day. Signs to alert you to the beginning of labor include regular, harder pressure on your stomach, a blood-streaked discharge, and/or a flow or trickle of fluid (your "water").

Your Baby

Your baby should be head down into the birthing position, ready to be born. His movements may seem different now because there is less space for him to move around. Your baby now is about 19 inches long and weighs six and one-half to seven and one-half pounds.

Eating Well

Eating fiber-rich foods can prevent or reduce constipation problems now as well as after baby comes. Lots of water, juice, milk and other fluids will help your body get rid of excess fluid.

Questions to Ask

1. How can I tell if I am in true labor?
2. What can I do to help cope with the pain of labor?
3. When do I call the midwife?



4. When does the midwife visit for postpartum (after delivery) checkups? When does my baby get checked for the first time?