

North Carolina Women's Hospital

Nausea and Vomiting During Pregnancy

"Morning Sickness"

What is "morning sickness"?

"Morning sickness" is the nausea and vomiting that happens during pregnancy. Because this often occurs in the morning it is called "morning sickness", but it can happen anytime during the day or night. Two out of three women experience these symptoms, which are most common during the first 3 months of pregnancy. Although nausea and vomiting are unpleasant, they are harmless unless severe vomiting develops.

What are the causes of nausea and vomiting during pregnancy?

It is not known exactly why pregnant women have nausea and vomiting. However, changes in hormone and blood sugar levels may cause these problems. Some women are more sensitive to these changes than others.

Are there things I can do to make myself feel better?

There are many comfort measures to help pregnant women who suffer from nausea and vomiting during pregnancy. The ideas listed below are likely to help you but it may take a while to find the ones that give you the most relief. To help you decide what works best, keep a diary of when you have nausea or vomiting, the comfort measures you try and whether they help.

- Choose foods carefully. Opt for foods that are high in carbohydrates, low in fat and easy to digest. Salty foods are sometimes helpful, as are foods that contain ginger — such as ginger lollipops. Avoid greasy, spicy and fatty foods.
- Snack often. Before getting out of bed in the morning, eat a few soda crackers or a piece of dry toast. Nibble throughout the day, rather than eating three larger meals. An empty stomach may aggravate nausea.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Sip water or ginger ale. It may also help to suck on hard candy, ice chips or ice pops.
- Pay attention to nausea triggers. Avoid foods or smells that seem to make your nausea worse.
- Get plenty of fresh air. Weather permitting, open the windows in your home or workplace. Take a daily walk outdoors.
- Take care with prenatal vitamins. If you feel queasy after taking prenatal vitamins, take the vitamins at night or with a snack. It may also help to chew gum or suck on hard candy after taking your prenatal vitamin. If these steps don't help, ask your health care provider about switching to a type of prenatal vitamin that doesn't contain iron.

When should I call my health care provider?

Vomiting all day without keeping any fluids in your stomach is serious because it can cause you to become dehydrated. Dehydration could be bad for you and your unborn baby. If at-home remedies do not help, your health care provider may prescribe medication for your nausea and vomiting. You should contact your health care provider if you are vomiting more than 3 or 4 times a day AND:

- Not keeping any fluids in your stomach
- Losing weight
- Urinating less than usual
- Feeling very thirsty
- Feeling dizzy or confused

*Approved by NC Women's Hospital Patient Education Committee, May 20, 2002;
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