

Pregnancy

INTRODUCTION

All women need care and attention during pregnancy. This care is usually called prenatal or antenatal care. Prenatal care helps pregnant women be healthier and have fewer problems in birth. Prenatal care should come from the woman herself, from her family and the community, and from a midwife or someone else who is experienced in helping pregnant women.



In some places, midwives only care for women when they are in labor or giving birth, not during pregnancy. This may be because most of the time, people only go to a healer or doctor when they are sick or if something is wrong. Most pregnancies do not cause noticeable problems, so people may not think that prenatal care is important. But most midwives know that women who have good care during pregnancy are more likely to have safer births and healthier babies.



Care in pregnancy has 2 purposes:

1. **Observing and listening** to the pregnant woman by checking her body for healthy signs and warning signs and by asking her about problems or listening to her questions.
2. **Teaching** a woman how to have a healthier pregnancy (for example, how to eat a healthy diet and how to avoid harmful things).

Midwives should start prenatal care as soon as a woman knows she is pregnant, and should examine the woman regularly during the pregnancy. These meetings, also called “checkups,” give you more chances to share information and prevent health problems. Seeing a woman regularly helps you make sure the mother is physically and emotionally healthy, and that the baby is growing well. You can notice and respond to problems before they become serious. These visits may also help a woman speak more freely with you about her own concerns and trust you more fully at the birth.

A good goal for most pregnant women is to have 1 checkup each month for the first 5 months of pregnancy, then 2 checkups each month during months 6 to 8, and 1 checkup each week for the last month. Women who have already had 1 or more healthy births may not need as many checkups. Any woman who has warning signs should have checkups more often.

This section is divided into 3 different chapters:

- Chapter 6 explains the changes a woman may go through in pregnancy.
- Chapter 7 explains how to learn about a woman’s health history during the first checkup.
- Chapter 8 explains how to check a woman for healthy signs and warning signs at each checkup.



CHAPTER 6

Common changes in pregnancy

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Common changes in pregnancy



During pregnancy a woman's body changes. These changes can sometimes be uncomfortable, but most of the time they are not a sign that something is wrong. In this chapter, we describe some of these changes, and discuss ways to help women feel better. We also explain how to tell when a woman's discomfort may be a sign that something dangerous is happening with her pregnancy.

There are many ideas about how to treat the discomforts of pregnancy. We cannot explain all of these ideas here. If you know remedies or treatments for these problems which we do not explain, use the remedies that work for you. We do not have all the answers. But use the ideas on page 19 to help you decide if remedies are helpful or if they may be harmful. Not all remedies work.

Changes in eating and sleeping

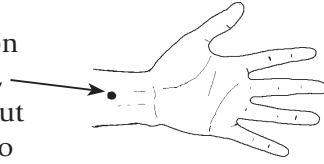
Upset stomach (nausea) and dislike of some foods

Many women have nausea in the first months of pregnancy. Sometimes it is called morning sickness. No one knows for sure what causes morning sickness, but for many women, the way they eat affects it. If the nausea is mild, encourage the woman to try any of these remedies:

- Eat a food that has protein before bed or in the night. Some good foods with protein are beans, nuts, and cheese.
- Eat a few crackers, dry bread, dry tortillas, dry chapatis, or other grain food when she first wakes up in the morning.
- Eat many small meals instead of 2 or 3 larger ones, and take small sips of liquid often.
- Take 50 milligrams vitamin B6, 2 times each day. (Do not take more.)



- Use acupressure to relieve nausea. Find the spot 3 fingers above the wrist between the 2 tendons on the inside of the woman's arm. Press on this spot, moving your finger in small circles. Press firmly but not hard enough to hurt. If acupressure is going to help, the woman should start to feel better within 5 minutes.



- Drink a cup of ginger, mint, or cinnamon tea 2 or 3 times a day, before meals. To make mint or cinnamon tea, put a teaspoon of mint leaves or a stick of cinnamon in a cup of boiled water. Let the tea sit for a few minutes before drinking it. To make ginger tea, boil crushed or sliced ginger root in water for at least 15 minutes.

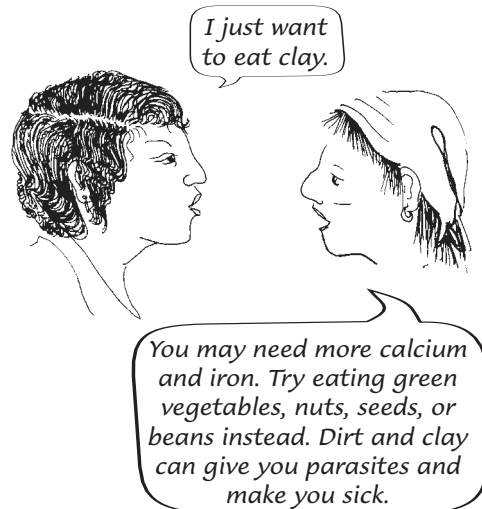
A pregnant woman may suddenly dislike a food that she usually likes. It is OK not to eat that food, and she will probably begin to like it again after the birth. She should be careful that the rest of her diet contains a lot of nutritious food.

Food cravings

A food craving is a strong desire to eat a certain food, or even something that is not food at all, like dirt, chalk, or clay.

If a woman gets a craving for nutritious foods (like beans, eggs, fruits, and vegetables), it is OK for her to eat as much as she wants. But if she wants a lot of "junk food" (like candy, soda, or packaged snacks) she should eat nutritious food first.

A woman who craves things that are not food, like dirt or clay, should **not** eat them. They may poison her and her baby. They may also give her parasites, like worms, that can make her sick. Encourage her to eat iron-rich foods (see page 36) and calcium-rich foods (see page 38) instead.



Burning or pain in the stomach or between the breasts (heartburn)

A burning feeling or pain in the stomach or between the breasts is called indigestion or heartburn. Heartburn happens because the growing baby crowds the mother's stomach and pushes it higher than usual. The acids in the mother's stomach that help digest food are pushed up into her chest, where they cause a burning feeling. This is not dangerous and usually goes away after the birth.

Here are some things a woman can try to make herself more comfortable:

- Keep her stomach less full by eating smaller meals more often and by eating foods and drinking liquids separately.
- Avoid eating spicy or greasy foods, drinking coffee, or smoking cigarettes — all of which can irritate the stomach.
- Regularly eat papaya or pineapple, which have enzymes that help the stomach digest food.
- Keep her head higher than her stomach when lying down or sleeping. This will keep her stomach acids in her belly and out of her chest.
- Calm the acids in the stomach by drinking milk or taking a low-salt antacid that contains no aspirin. (Antacids are not dangerous but they cost money and they make it harder for the body to use nutrients from food. Try other methods before using antacids.)



Sleepiness

Some pregnant women feel sleepy much of the day. This is most common during the first 3 months.

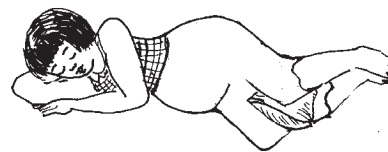
It is normal for pregnant women to feel sleepy. Their bodies are telling them to slow down and rest. But if a woman also feels weak, she may have other problems, like a sickness, depression (see page 274), or anemia (see page 116).



Difficulty sleeping

If a woman cannot sleep because she is uncomfortable or restless, it may help if:

- she lies on her side with something comfortable between her knees and at her lower back. She can use a pillow, a rolled-up blanket, banana leaves, or some other padding.
- someone gives her a massage.
- she drinks herbal teas that help her sleep.



Fighting, worry, and unhappiness in a woman's house or family can make it difficult for her to sleep. If possible, a family should avoid arguing before going to sleep.

Body changes and discomforts

Swollen breasts

A woman's breasts get bigger during pregnancy because they are getting ready to make milk for the baby. Sometimes the breasts are also itchy or sore.

During the last months of pregnancy, a watery, yellowish fluid may leak out of the nipples. This is not a sign of a problem. The fluid is colostrum — the first milk for the baby.



Swollen feet

Swelling of the feet is very common, especially in the afternoon or in hot weather. Swelling of the feet is usually not dangerous, but severe swelling when the mother wakes up in the morning, or swelling of the hands and face anytime, can be signs of pre-eclampsia (see page 125).

Swelling in the feet may improve if the woman puts her feet up for a few minutes at least 2 or 3 times a day, eats fewer packaged foods that are very salty, and drinks more water or fruit juices.

Swollen veins (varicose veins)

Swollen blue veins that appear in the legs or on the woman's genitals are called varicose veins. Sometimes these veins hurt. If the swollen veins are in the legs, they may feel better if the mother puts her feet up often. Strong stockings or elastic bandages may also help.

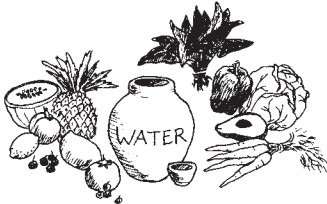
If the swollen veins are around the genitals, they can cause bleeding problems if they tear during birth. Putting a cool cabbage leaf on the genitals may help.



Constipation (difficulty passing stool)

Some pregnant women have difficulty passing stool. This is called constipation.

To prevent or treat constipation, a woman should:



- eat more vegetables and fruits.
- eat whole grains (brown rice and whole wheat instead of white rice or white flour).
- drink at least 8 cups of clean water a day.
- walk, move, and exercise every day.

Home or plant remedies that soften the stool or make it slippery (like remedies made from psyllium seed or certain fruits or fiber plants) may also help.



WARNING! Pregnant women should not take medicines called **laxatives or purgatives for constipation**. These work by making the bowels tighten or contract — and they may cause labor to start too soon. Some can harm the baby.

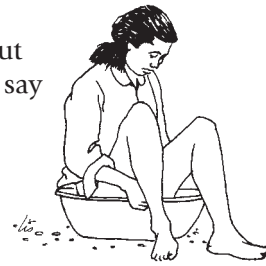
Also, pregnant women should not wash out the bowels with water (enema). This could also start labor too soon.

Hemorrhoids (piles)

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins around the anus. They may burn, hurt, or itch. Sometimes they bleed when the woman passes stool, especially if she is constipated. The woman should try to avoid getting constipated by eating a lot of fruit and vegetables and drinking plenty of fluids.

Sitting or standing a lot can make hemorrhoids worse. But sitting in a cool bath or lying down can help. Some women say it helps to soak a clove of garlic in vegetable oil and then insert it into the anus.

If you have heard of other remedies, ask an experienced health worker whether they are safe. Some remedies are dangerous for pregnant women and may hurt the baby.



Pregnant women need to urinate much more often.

Needing to urinate often

Needing to urinate (pee) often is normal, especially in the first and last months of pregnancy. This happens because the growing womb presses against the bladder (the place where the body stores urine). It is so common that some midwives joke: “A man who cannot find his pregnant wife should wait near the place where she urinates. If she is not there, she will be soon!”

If urinating hurts, itches, or burns, the woman may have a bladder infection (see page 128) or a vaginal infection (see Chapter 18). Be sure to treat these infections right away — they can cause early labor and other problems.

Discharge (wetness from the vagina)

Discharge is the wetness all women have from the vagina. A woman’s body uses this discharge to clean itself from the inside. Usually clear or yellowish, for many women the amount and appearance of this discharge changes at different times in their monthly cycle. Pregnant women often have a lot of discharge, especially near the end of pregnancy.

Gray, green, lumpy, or bad-smelling discharge can be a sign of infection. If the vagina itches or burns, this is also a sign of infection (see Chapter 18).

Difficulty getting up and down

It is better if a pregnant woman does not lie flat on her back. When a woman is on her back, the weight of the womb presses on the big blood vessels that bring food and oxygen to the baby. If the mother wants to be on her back, she should put something behind her so she is not lying completely flat.

A pregnant woman should also be careful how she gets up. She should not sit up like this:



Instead, she should roll to the side and push herself up with her hands, like this:



Shortness of breath

Many women get short of breath (cannot breathe as deeply as usual) when they are pregnant. This is because the growing baby crowds the mother's lungs and she has less room to breathe. Reassure her that this is normal. To help her breathe better, suggest sitting in a more upright position, putting more pillows or other support behind her back when sleeping or resting, and moving more slowly when she is active.

But if a woman is also weak and tired, or if she is short of breath **all of the time**, she should be checked for signs of sickness, heart problems, anemia (see page 116), or poor diet (see page 117). Get medical advice if you think she may have any of these problems.

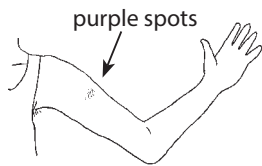
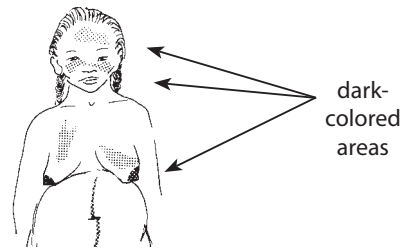
Feeling hot or sweating a lot

Feeling hot is very common, and as long as there are no other warning signs (such as signs of bladder infection, see page 128), the woman should not worry. She can dress in cool clothes, bathe frequently, and drink plenty of water and other fluids.



The mask of pregnancy

The mask of pregnancy is a name for dark-colored areas that may appear on the face, breasts, and belly of some pregnant women. This mask is not harmful. Usually most of the color goes away after the birth. A woman may be able to avoid dark areas on her face by wearing a hat when she goes out in the sun.



Purple spots on the skin

Purple spots come from small groups of veins under the skin. They sometimes happen when blood vessels swell. They are not harmful and usually go away after the birth.

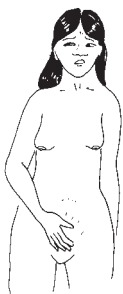
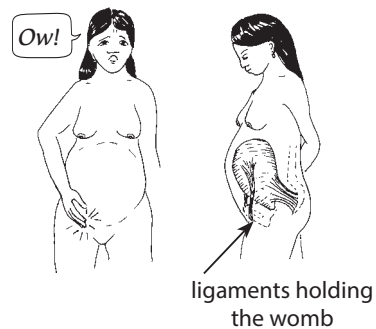
Aches and pains in the joints

A pregnant woman's body gets soft and loose so the baby can get bigger, and so she can give birth. Sometimes her joints also get loose and uncomfortable, especially the hips. This is not dangerous, but she can more easily sprain her ankles or other joints. So she should move more carefully. Her joints will feel better after the birth.

Sudden pain in the side of the lower belly

The womb is held in place by ligaments on each side. Ligaments are like ropes that attach the womb to the mother's bones.

A sudden movement will sometimes cause a sharp pain in these ligaments. This is not dangerous. The pain will stop in a few minutes. It may help to stroke the belly gently, or to put a warm cloth on it.



Cramps in early pregnancy

It is not unusual to have **mild** cramps (like mild monthly bleeding cramps) at times during the first 3 months of pregnancy. These cramps happen because the womb is growing.

Cramps that are regular (come and go in a pattern) or constant (always there), are very strong or painful, or come with spotting or bleeding are warning signs. The woman may have a tubal pregnancy (see page 113) or may be having a miscarriage (see page 91). She should get medical help immediately.

Baby's kicks hurt the mother

Most of the baby's movements feel good. But sometimes babies kick very hard or always in the same place. And sometimes the baby's head bounces against the mother's back or bladder during the last weeks of pregnancy. These movements may make the mother sore or uncomfortable, but they are not harmful.



WARNING! The mother usually feels regular kicks every day by the 6th or 7th month. If the baby stops kicking for a few hours, it is OK. But **if the mother feels no movement for more than a day and a night, there may be a problem.** The mother should meet with her midwife or get medical help.

Back pain

Many women get back pain. The weight of the baby, the womb, and the waters all pull on the woman's bones and muscles. Too much standing in one place, or leaning forward, or hard work can also cause back pain. Sometimes back pain can be caused by a kidney infection (see page 128).

Encourage husbands, other family members, or friends to massage the woman's back. A warm cloth or hot water bottle on her back may also feel good. Her family can also help by doing some of the heavy work (carrying small children, washing clothes, farming, and milling grain) for her.

This angry cat exercise may reduce back pain. Do this exercise a few times in a row, 2 times a day, whenever there is back pain.



Start on hands and knees with the back flat.



Push the lower back up.



Return to flat back. Repeat.



Late in pregnancy a strap like this may also help.

Leg cramps

Many women get foot or leg cramps — sharp sudden pain and tightening of a muscle. These cramps especially come at night, or when women stretch and point their toes. To stop the cramp: flex the foot (point it upward) and then gently stroke the leg to help it relax (do not stroke hard). See page 273 to learn when leg pain can be dangerous.

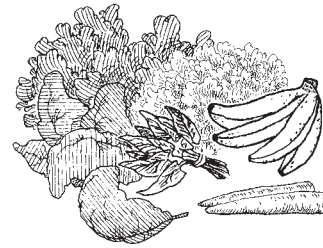
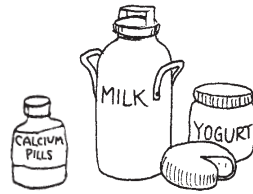
Point the toe up, then stroke the leg.



Do not point the toe down.



To prevent more cramps, a woman should not point her toes (even when stretching), and she should eat more foods high in calcium and potassium. The woman can also try taking calcium, magnesium, and potassium pills.



Foods rich in calcium and potassium can help prevent leg cramps.

Headaches

Headaches are common in pregnancy but are usually harmless. Headaches may stop if the mother rests and relaxes more, drinks more juice or water, or gently massages her temples. It is OK for a pregnant woman to take 2 paracetamol tablets with water once in a while.



Some women have migraine headaches. These are strong headaches, often on the side of the head. The woman may see spots and feel nauseated. Bright light or sunshine can make them worse. Migraines may get worse in pregnancy.

Unfortunately, migraine medicine is very dangerous in pregnancy. It can cause labor to start too soon, and it may also harm the baby. It is better for a pregnant woman with migraines to take 500 to 1000 milligrams paracetamol, and rest in a dark room. Although coffee and black tea are usually not healthy in pregnancy, they are OK occasionally and they may help cure a migraine.

Headaches late in pregnancy are a warning sign of pre-eclampsia, especially if there is also high blood pressure or swelling of the face or hands.

Other pains

It is common to have other small aches and pains during pregnancy. Get medical advice for pain that is unusual in pregnancy, such as:

- red, swollen joints.
- severe pain.
- signs of anemia with joint pain (see page 116 on anemia).



WARNING! If there is pain in one leg that will not go away, it may be a blood clot. See page 273 and get medical help.

Changing feelings and emotions

Pregnancy is an important time in a woman's life. Her baby is growing inside her, her body is changing, and she needs more food and more rest. As a woman's body changes, her relationships, her sexuality, and her work life can change too.

Sudden changes in feelings

Pregnancy can make women very emotional. Some women laugh or cry for no clear reason. Some feel depressed, angry, or irritable.

Odd laughing or crying and other sudden mood changes or strong feelings are common. They usually pass quickly. But do not ignore a woman's feelings simply because she is pregnant. Her feelings are real.

Worry and fear

Many women worry when they are pregnant, especially about the baby's health and about giving birth. A woman's worries about other problems in her life may also become stronger when she is pregnant.

Such worries are common. They do **not** mean that something bad will happen. Women with these feelings need emotional support, like someone to listen to their worries and encourage them to feel hopeful. They may also need help to solve the problems they are having in their lives, like problems with their partners, money, drugs or alcohol, or other issues.

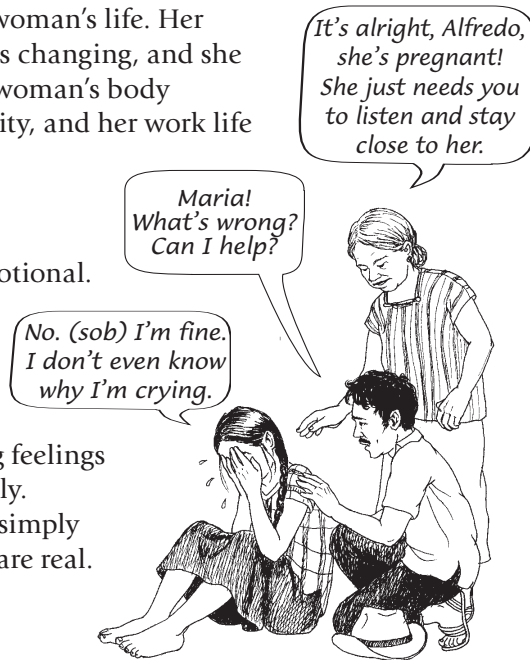


Strange dreams and nightmares

Pregnant women may have strong, vivid dreams. They can be beautiful, strange, or frightening.

For many people, dreams are an important way of understanding themselves and the world. Some people believe that dreams can tell us about the future or give us messages from spirits.

But usually, when something happens in a dream, that does not mean that it will happen to us in life. The events in the dream may be telling us what we are afraid of or what we desire. Or they may simply be stories our minds make up while we sleep. Women who are having frightening dreams may need someone to talk to about their hopes, fears, and feelings.



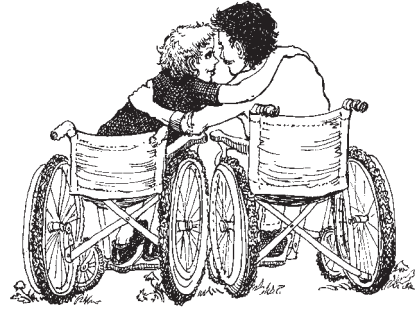


Forgetfulness

Some women forget things when they are pregnant. For most women, this is not a big problem. But some may worry if they do not know it is normal. No one knows why women become more forgetful when they are pregnant, but it is common.

Feelings about sex

Some women do not want much sex when they are pregnant. Others want sex more than usual. Both feelings are common and OK to have. Having sex and not having sex are both OK for the woman and her baby. Sex is not dangerous for the baby.



Sometimes sex is uncomfortable in pregnancy. A woman and her partner can try different positions for making love. It may feel better with the woman on top, or in a sitting or standing position, or with the woman lying on her side.

There are other ways, besides sex, for couples to be close and please each other. Some couples touch and massage each other's bodies. Some talk about hopes and fears together.

Safer sex

When a pregnant woman has sex, it is important to avoid infection by making sure that anything put inside her body is clean. This includes the penis and hands.

A man who is having sex with more than one woman must **always** use condoms — including with his pregnant partner. Condoms are a good way to prevent infections, HIV, and other illnesses. See Chapter 18 to learn more about HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Sex and early labor

A woman who has gone into early labor in other pregnancies might choose to avoid sex after the 6th month. This may help prevent going into labor too early.

