

Congratulations!

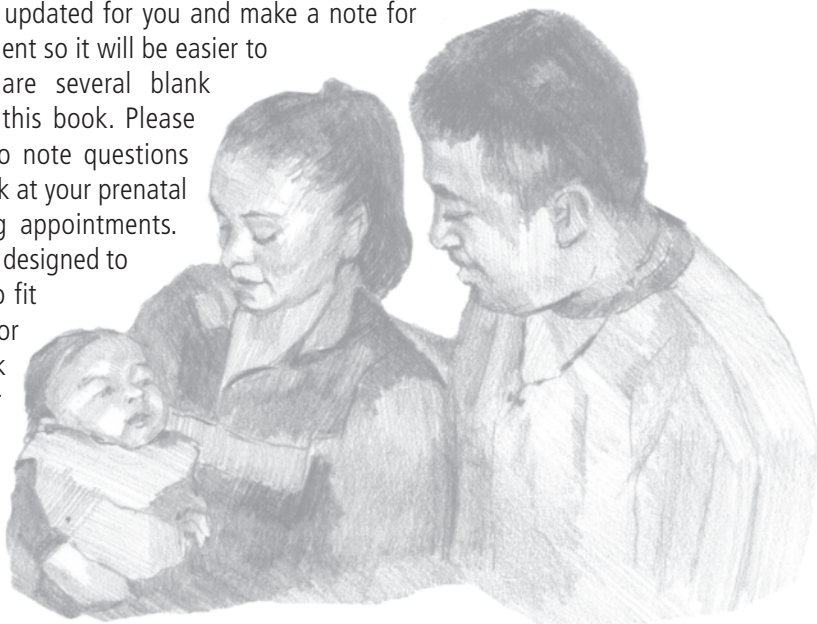
You are about to experience the universal and normal process of having a baby. You probably have many questions about how to provide the best possible care for the newest member of your family.

All of these questions and many more will be answered in this book.

- What body changes can you expect?
- What foods are best to eat while you are pregnant?
- Which substances are potentially dangerous to you and your new baby?
- What exercises are helpful during pregnancy?
- How is the baby growing month-by-month?
- What will occur during regular office appointments?
- What can you expect during labor and delivery?

The information in this book is meant to be used as a supplement to your prenatal education and care. This book cannot be used by itself without the expert guidance of your OB provider. It is important to remember every woman is different and so is every pregnancy.

In order for you to keep track of your appointments and your progress, an “Appointment Record” is included at the beginning of this book. Ask your OB provider to keep it updated for you and make a note for your next appointment so it will be easier to remember. There are several blank pages throughout this book. Please use these pages to note questions you may wish to ask at your prenatal classes and during appointments. This book has been designed to be small enough to fit into most purses for easy transport back and forth to your classes and OB provider’s office.



Discomforts of Pregnancy

During the course of a normal pregnancy there are minor discomforts that you may encounter. You cannot always make them disappear, but you can decrease your discomforts if you try some of the hints listed below. If you are not feeling well physically or emotionally with the pregnancy, call your OB provider.

Backache:

Most pregnant women have some degree of backache due to postural changes and ligament stretching and pulling.

Relief Measures: Rest frequently during the day. Maintain good posture. Don't stand in one position or one place too long - shift positions. Use a footstool under your feet while sitting. Wear low-heeled shoes. When picking things up or bending over, bend your knees instead of at your waist. This will cause less strain on your back. The Pelvic Rock (page 28) relieves the low backache. The upper backache is relieved by Shoulder Circling (page 27). If you experience any low, dull backache (that may radiate to side or front) that is rhythmic or constant and not relieved by a change in position, call your OB provider immediately. (See "Pre-Term Labor," page 48.)

Bleeding Gums:

Caused by increased blood volume, swollen mucous membranes and fragile capillaries.

Relief Measures: A dental exam should be a regular part of your prenatal health care. Frequent oral hygiene, increased flossing and "finger massage" of gums will help. If it happens even when not brushing teeth, see your dentist. (See "Dental Work," page 17.)

Breasts:

Begin to enlarge in preparation for lactation and may be tender and even begin leaking. Nipples (areola) may become darker and larger.

Relief Measures: Wear a good support bra. You may find it more comfortable to wear it while sleeping. Your bra should have wide non-elastic straps to provide good support. Wear nursing pads for leaking that are not plastic lined.

Constipation:

This is due to changes in your digestive system. The pressure of the growing uterus may impair the motion of the intestines.

Relief Measures: Eat raw fruits, vegetables, prunes and whole grain or bran cereals. Drink at least 8 glasses of fluid a day. A cup of hot water with lemon three times a day may be helpful. Exercise – walking is especially good. Never hold back the urge to have a bowel movement. Regularity is very important. A "bulk-producing" substance (such as Metamucil, Fibercon or Senekot) or stool softener (such as Colace) may be suggested by your OB provider. Consult your provider before using any medication, or if the symptoms continue.

Difficulty Sleeping:

General discomfort due to any number of “normal” pregnancy symptoms plus inability to get in a comfortable position.

Relief Measures: Do not eat immediately before sleep but drinking milk sometimes helps. Practice relaxation techniques. It may help to go for a walk in the evening followed by a comfortable bath.

Dizziness:

A variety of factors can cause dizziness: Low blood sugar, low blood pressure, standing for extended periods of time and sudden changes of position are a few causes.

Relief Measures: Move slowly when changing positions to avoid creating blood pressure changes, especially if you have been lying down. Eat regular meals. Avoid long exposure to the sun. Discuss these feelings with your OB provider.

Face Pigmentation:

“Mask of Pregnancy” - It is caused by changes in the hormonal levels.

Relief Measures: Experiment with different makeup. Limit exposure to the sun. Usually fades or disappears after pregnancy. A darkened line from the umbilicus down to the pubic area might also be noticed (Linea Negra).

Faint Feeling:

(When Lying on Your Back) - Weight of the pregnant uterus causes pressure on the greater vessels which return blood to your heart.

Relief Measures: Avoid lying flat on your back. If you experience loss of consciousness notify your OB provider promptly.

Fatigue:

Caused by a decrease in the hemoglobin due to a 35 to 50% increase in the blood volume. It is common to feel this early in pregnancy and again the last two months.

Relief Measures: Try to get daily exercise to help prevent fatigue by conditioning your body and improving circulation. Plan to relax by lying down at least once a day. Get plenty of sleep during the night. Do not overdo. Eat well balanced meals and be sure to take your vitamins. Take iron supplements if prescribed. If your tiredness continues, consult your OB provider.

Frequency of Urination:

The growing uterus presses against the bladder the first months of pregnancy. During mid-trimester the lower segment of the uterus is drawn up, relieving the problem.

Relief Measures: Frequency of urination may be normal. Continue to drink plenty of water. If you have pain with urination or have any low abdominal discomfort call your OB provider.

Headache:

Caused from an increase in circulating blood volume and from the hormone progesterone.

Relief Measures: Try to get adequate sleep, eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water to prevent headaches. If you do get a headache, try taking a nap, get a massage or try applying warm or cold packs to your temples and forehead. These usually subside after the third month. An acetaminophen product such as Tylenol may be suggested by your OB provider. Call your OB provider if the headaches persist, especially those that appear in the last three months of pregnancy.

Heartburn:

This may occur any time during the pregnancy. It has nothing to do with the heart. It is a burning sensation in the chest or abdomen caused by food backing up from the stomach (reflux).

Relief Measures: Don't lie flat just after eating. However, sometimes lying on your left side or being propped up with pillows may prevent the reflux of food. Avoid heavy, greasy and spicy foods. Try eating smaller amounts of food, but eat more often and drink a small amount of milk or cold water. If it persists, a low-sodium antacid (such as Tums, Maalox or Mylanta) may be recommended by your OB provider. DO NOT take baking soda or any other home remedy. The sodium in these can contribute to fluid retention. Contact your OB provider if your symptoms persist.

Hemorrhoids:

These are varicose veins around the anus and rectum. They are caused by pressure that interferes with circulation.

Relief Measures: Prevention of constipation is important in preventing and treating hemorrhoids. If they protrude through the rectum, you can carefully push them back with a lubricated finger. The Modified Knee-Chest position and hip elevation may help relieve the discomfort (page 25). Practice the Kegel exercise (page 26). Witch Hazel soaks are soothing. Products such as Anusol, Tuck's pads or Preparation H can be purchased at the drug store and may offer some relief from your discomfort. Contact your OB provider if your symptoms continue.

Leg Cramps:

These are generally due to pressure of the enlarged uterus on the circulation of the extremities. They can also be due to the fact that calcium is less easily absorbed during pregnancy. They may occur anytime but especially during the last three months. Leg cramps are not a serious condition but can be very painful.

Relief Measures: Elevate legs frequently during the day. Use a heating pad or hot water bottle for relief. Point toes upward and press down on the kneecap or hold the back of a chair and slide the foot of the cramping leg as far back as you can, keeping the heel flat. This stretches the calf muscle and helps relieve the cramp. Increase calcium (page 12) in your diet. If unable to get adequate calcium from food sources, ask your OB provider about calcium substitutes.

Increased Perspiration:

Activity of the sweat glands is increased.

Relief Measures: Bathing more frequently and changing deodorants sometimes will help.

Nausea (Morning Sickness):

It is not unusual to feel nausea in the beginning of pregnancy.

Relief Measures: Eat dry crackers, toast or cereal before getting out of bed or whenever nausea starts. Eat 5 to 6 small meals each day so your stomach does not get empty. Eating foods in the evening that are high in protein (peanut butter sandwich with a glass of milk) may help. Avoid greasy or spicy foods. Limit your liquid intake during meals but drink water freely between meals. Avoid strong food smells until nausea passes. If nausea persists after trying the above, let your OB provider know.

Nosebleeds:

Caused by increased blood volume, swollen mucous membranes and fragile capillaries.

Relief Measures: May be easily stopped by rest and pressure at the bridge of the nose. If bleeding is frequent and heavy, consult your OB provider.

Pelvic Discomfort:

This can be very common. The growing uterus pulls on the round ligaments, causing pelvic pain. Hormonal influences cause pubic bone and joint relaxation. In the last months of pregnancy, your pelvic joints are movable and this is uncomfortable. Moving fast or coughing may even send a pain up into your abdomen from your pelvis.

Relief Measures: Call your OB provider with any pain or pressure to determine the cause and appropriate care. There are various causes for pelvic discomfort, such as muscle and joint strain, fatigue, excessive weight gain, and pre-term labor. Rest on your left side. Specific exercises such as the Modified Knee-Chest Position (page 25) may help decrease this discomfort. If you experience no relief from the above suggestions, or if you are experiencing rhythmic or constant cramping not relieved by change in position, call your OB provider immediately. (See "Pre-Term Labor," page 48.)

Shortness of Breath:

Difficulty in breathing may be due to the pressure on the diaphragm by the growing baby.

Relief Measures: Moving slowly will help. Lie on your left side, head elevated on more than one pillow. Sometimes sleeping on a lounge chair is necessary. Good posture, rib cage lifting and shoulder circling are of value also. It may be somewhat relieved after "lightening" (baby moves down into the pelvic bones) and will disappear after birth. It is important to discuss this feeling with your OB provider.

Stretch Marks:

They are the result of a breakdown in the lower, less elastic layer of skin. They are also a result of hereditary tendencies. Commonly appear on the lower abdomen, breasts, thighs and buttocks.

Relief Measures: Massaging with lotion will reduce the dryness and itching associated with stretching. Stretch marks fade after the pregnancy but can't be prevented.

Swelling of Lower Extremities (Edema):

Slight swelling of the feet is common and is especially prone to occur in hot weather. It is caused by increased pressure of the uterus on the lower vessels.

Relief Measures: Avoid constricting clothing. Get frequent exercise and drink plenty of fluids. Eat at least three 2-3 ounce servings of protein each day. Lie down when you can and change positions frequently. Try to rest for at least 30-60 minutes daily on your left side with your legs slightly elevated on a pillow. Report any swelling that does not decrease with the above suggestions, or that is present when you wake up in the morning, or any swelling around face or eyes.

Vaginal Discharge:

During pregnancy there are increased vaginal secretions due to the increased blood supply.

Relief Measures: Do not douche. Bathe frequently. Wear cotton panties. Avoid panty hose and/or tight-fitting pants. Avoid vaginal sprays, powders, feminine hygiene products and colored or scented toilet tissue. Vaginal discharge should not be greenish color, foul smelling or irritating. If you have an increase in the amount of mucous or watery discharge, call your OB provider. (See "Pre-Term Labor," page 48.)

Varicose Veins:

These may occur in the lower extremities or extend as high as the pelvis. During pregnancy, the pressure on the abdominal veins by the uterus interferes with the return of blood from the lower legs. If you are constantly on your feet, you will have increased abdominal pressure. The greater the pressure, the higher the tendency of varicose veins.

Relief Measures: You should never wear tight articles of clothing. If possible do not stand in one place for a long period of time (walk about at breaktime or lie on your left side). Do not sit with your legs crossed or with the pressure of the chair under your knees. Support hose may be helpful and should be put on before getting out of bed. If you have varicose veins around your vagina, try to take frequent rest periods with your hips elevated on a pillow. The Modified Knee-Chest position (page 25) is helpful. If you experience any warmth, redness or tenderness of your groin or legs notify your OB provider immediately.