

*What We Expect When **You're** Expecting*

Sarah Bergeron, certified in Inpatient Obstetrics and as a Women's Healthcare Nurse Practitioner, provides insight into some of the common problems of a healthy pregnancy.

The past twenty five years have brought technological advances in medicine that have allowed us to take a new look into the world of pregnancy. The advances in reproductive medicine can allow us to look step by step at the reproductive system. We can now look at a woman's hormones, her uterus and fallopian tubes and, in some special instances, implant a baby into the uterus. Now many women who before only had a dream of being pregnant are actually experiencing the joys of pregnancy and motherhood. The changes in ultrasound have allowed us to look into the baby's environment with a dimension that was never before possible. We are able to see our baby's expressions and smiles and we begin to have a sense of their behavior and personalities. The delivery experience has been revolutionized by the use of epidural anesthesia allowing mothers to have more choices in how they spend their time in labor.

Although we have many new tools to use in optimizing pregnancy there are many things about pregnancy that will never change. There are many discomforts of pregnancy that do not indicate a medical problem but that are a direct result of hormonal and anatomical changes. Always consult your physician or healthcare provider if you have concerns about how you are feeling. These are a few of the most common discomforts of pregnancy.

1) Nausea – The most typical onset of nausea, commonly referred to as morning sickness, is between 4 and 8 weeks and usually improves significantly by 14 weeks. Up to 70% of all women experience some nausea. Don't be misled by thinking this only happens in the morning; it can happen at any time. Eating small frequent meals and a protein snack at bedtime can be helpful. Ginger ale or oral ginger supplements (250 milligrams four times a day) have been found to decrease nausea. Spicy and greasy foods should be avoided. The use of over-the-counter B6 vitamins (25 milligrams every eight hours) can also decrease these symptoms. There are prescription medications available for more severe nausea and vomiting. The good news is that nausea in pregnancy is usually associated with a good outcome.

2) Fatigue – The hormones of pregnancy can cause extreme tiredness, especially in the first trimester. Try to allow for naps when possible and a reasonable bedtime. In our busy lives with work, marriage, children and other responsibilities we sometimes overestimate our energy levels.

3) Round Ligament Pain – It is not uncommon for a woman to experience sharp pains in the groin area. This may be felt on both sides or only on one side. The round ligaments hold the uterus in place in the pelvis. As the uterus grows the additional weight puts stress on those ligaments. Unlike contractions, this pain is usually more persistent lasting for hours. Warm baths, Tylenol and rest are recommended.

4) Heartburn – The hormones produced during pregnancy cause relaxation in the esophageal sphincter which contributes to heartburn. This is a common occurrence in pregnancy. Avoiding large meals, greasy and spicy foods, and carbonated drinks may be helpful. Also allow two to three hours after eating before lying down. Over-the-counter antacids are helpful and at times prescription medications may be used.

Baby blues are not uncommon. About 70% of all women experience some degree of baby blues within the first 7-10 days after delivery. The physiologic changes of delivery, the hormone fluctuations and the sleeplessness of having a newborn are things that affect all of us in the first few weeks. During this time you may feel a wide variety of emotions. Tearfulness, irritability, fatigue or times of feeling overwhelmed are just a few of the symptoms of baby blues. This is not the time to prove you are superwoman. It is important to use your support system. Ask spouses, family and friends for help with the baby, with daily tasks, or with any of your other needs. These feelings usually improve within a few days but if they don't you should call your doctor or healthcare provider.

While there are medical conditions that can complicate pregnancy and delivery most women of childbearing age are young and healthy. Your healthcare providers will consider your medical history and be watching for anything that may develop in pregnancy.

Remember to relax and enjoy this time as you prepare for your new baby!