

Sickness & Vomiting in Pregnancy Information Leaflet

Sickness & Vomiting In Pregnancy

Around half of all pregnant women feel sick and vomit during early pregnancy. Symptoms are mild in most cases but in more severe cases an anti-sickness medicine may be recommended by your doctor or midwife.

If your nausea and vomiting is severe you should visit your GP.

Why do you have pregnancy sickness?

Your body goes through some big changes in early pregnancy. The hormones that keep your pregnancy going may also affect you:

- Energy levels (you can feel very tired)
- Emotions (you can easily feel close to tears)
- Gut

You may have a different taste in your mouth. Your saliva can be more acidic. This may be mild, with just some foods tasting different (for example, red meat may taste metallic), or severe with most foods and fluids tasting strange.

The contents of your stomach are more acidic and this can lead to a constant queasiness. Your gut is slower throughout pregnancy.

The muscle at the top of your stomach is more relaxed and you may get reflux of acid into your oesophagus, a feeling of nausea and heartburn.

An empty stomach can make all of these feelings worse, and hunger can actually be felt as nausea.

If your blood sugar drops low, this can also make you feel nauseous and weak. So it is important to try and eat during this time.

You often feel most nauseous first thing in the morning, which is why this condition is often referred to as 'morning sickness'. This is because your stomach is empty after not eating all night.

Golden Rules for Pregnancy Sickness

EAT OFTEN

This stops your stomach from becoming empty and your blood sugar becoming low.

The more severe the nausea and vomiting, the more frequently you should snack. Eat at least 6 times a day, and as frequently as every 15-20 minutes. The amount you eat will depend on how frequently you snack.

You might try just one mouthful of food or fluid every 15-20 minutes, or a small plateful every 2-3 hours.

Don't skip meals and snacks. It is important that you keep trying to eat, even if you are still vomiting. Keep some crackers, dry breakfast cereal, or other dry starchy food near the bed, and try a mouthful to settle your stomach before getting up in the morning.

DON'T GET DEHYDRATED

Being very dry will make you feel sick and give you a headache. Dehydration is worse for your health at this time than is the weight lost from nausea and vomiting.

Sometimes sickness in pregnancy causes lots of saliva production and you find yourself constantly spitting or swallowing this. You can become quite dry from spitting and should try to sip fluids frequently.

If you are passing little or dark urine, this can be due to dehydration. You need between 1.5 and 2.5 litres (8-10 glasses) of fluid each day. The high amounts are for summer months, or if you are losing a lot of fluid through sweating/spitting.

Try to sip 25ml or ¼ glass of fluid every 15- 20 minutes when vomiting is severe. Some people feel they are less nauseous when they don't take food and fluid together.

Avoid having your fluid as drinks containing caffeine (like tea, coffee, cola drinks) as these not only make your nausea worse, but will make you pass more urine.

Get fluids from:

- Chilled or hot water with or without lemon or lime slices, mint leave (boil the water then cool it or let water stand in a jug for a few hours to reduce the chlorine smell and taste)
- Ice pops or ice cubes
- Sports drinks

Try drinking through a straw or with a sealed cup.

USE CARBOHYDRATES (starchy foods)

Use these foods to settle your stomach and to provide energy for you and the baby.

The best carbohydrate foods to try are plain starchy foods such as:

- Bread/rolls
- Breakfast cereals
- Potatoes
- Pasta/rice
- Plain biscuits
- Crackers
- Toast
- Crumpet/muffin
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Try them dry when vomiting is severe.

What to Do On Bad Days

Try 2 or 3 days without iron supplements (and if this reduces your nausea ask your doctor or midwife if you need to keep taking iron).

Eat mainly carbohydrates. Try them dry when vomiting is severe. Eat very small amounts, very frequently throughout the day. Use only small amounts of proteins (like egg, meat) or fats (butter, margarine, oils) as these take longer to digest.

Suck on ice, ice cubes, crushed ice, ice pops.

- Freeze orange, melon pieces or grapes in cling film
- Freeze fruit juice or cordial in ice cube trays etc, frozen fruit products, like sorbets
- Simple drinks
- Dilute fruit juice
- Weak cordials
- Mineral or soda water
- Ginger beer, lemonade
- Lucozade
- Sports drinks

Good days

You need to catch up a bit! Widen your choices. Make sure you include foods from all food groups. Keep using carbohydrates as the basis for meals.

Rice:

- Topped with kebabs
- Your favourite curry (perhaps 'not so spicy')
- Stir-fry with meat, chicken, tofu and/ or vegetables
- Part of a hot dish (e.g. risotto)
- Accompaniment to a meal (e.g. rice pilaff)
- Salad

Potato:

- A side dish (e.g. potato au gratin)
- Stuffed jacket potato

Pasta:

- Topped with a sauce of your choice (go easy with fat or oil)
- A salad (e.g. pasta and tuna salad)

Bread:

- Bruschetta/focaccia, grilled with cheese on top
- Try making pizza out of flat breads
- Pitta bread filled with e.g. hot chicken stir fry or grated cheese, salad and mayonnaise
- Egg or beans on toast

Starting To Feel Better

Try adding some variety; also see if you can tolerate some low fat, protein rich foods:

- Jelly, custard, Angel Delight
- Steamed or boiled vegetables
- Soups made with milk (e.g. cream of chicken)
- Marmite/Vegemite on toast, crackers, crumpets
- Thinly sliced chicken or meat, no skin, no fat
- Pasta with a light sauce
- A sandwich

Try some different drinks

- Milk
- Other fruit juices, nectars or vegetable juices
- Milkshakes
- Marmite, Bovril
- Complan/Build-up

'Make hay while the sun shines' or have you thought ahead, making meals and freezing them for not-so-good days. Continue to eat a minimum of 6 small meals over the day. Gradually increase the amount and variety of food you eat over the day. Practice relaxation every day and try to take some walks in the fresh air and when you can, sit outside to eat and drink.

Some Extra Remedies

Ginger

There is some evidence that ginger settles the nausea associated with pregnancy. Ginger has been used in many cultures to relieve indigestion as well as other ailments. Ginger can be taken in the following ways:

- Sip a drink made from half a teaspoon powdered ginger dissolved in herbal tea or weak tea or coffee
- Sip a warm drink made from grated ginger root in a cup of hot water
- Sip on ginger beer
- Chew crystallised or glaze ginger
- Eat a ginger flavoured biscuit, like ginger snaps / ginger nuts
- Simmer a large crushed ginger root with 2 cups of water for 20 minutes, strain, add 1 tablespoon of honey, refrigerate and use this as a cordial with mineral water

Ginger is reported to take effect after about 25 minutes and lasts 4 or more hours. Ginger is available at most supermarkets in the herb section or the dried fruit section. Fresh ginger is sold by fruit and vegetable shops.

Peppermint

Some women have found peppermint to be helpful. Peppermint can be taken in the following way:

- Peppermint tea
- Cordial
- Peppermint sweets

Travel Bands

These are available from chemist shops and are worn on the wrist to prevent travel sickness. They work on the principle of acupressure (similar to acupuncture). Some people find that they help to relieve pregnancy sickness. Follow the directions on the packet.

Pregnancy Vitamins

The Department of Health recommends that all low risk pregnant women take 10 micrograms of vitamin D and 400 micrograms of folic acid as a supplement (healthy start or pregnancy vitamins contain this).

It is recommended that folic acid is taken until the end of the 12th week of pregnancy. However, all women in Liverpool should receive healthy start vitamins throughout pregnancy. You should also try to eat plenty of foods containing folate – the natural form of folic acid. Good food sources include broccoli, brussels sprouts, spinach, spring greens, peas, chick peas and granary and wholemeal breads. Folic acid is also added to some foods such breakfast cereals.

Healthy start vitamins are also recommended for women who are breastfeeding.

All women in Liverpool should receive Healthy Start vitamins

Further Information

NHS – www.nhs.uk

British Nutrition Foundation – www.nutrition4baby.co.uk

Healthy Start – www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Patient Information – www.patient.co.uk

Also, you will find more information in your hand held Liverpool Women's Hospital patient notes.

This leaflet can be made available in difference formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk