

## **Common Questions/Concerns During Pregnancy**

### **May I travel during pregnancy?**

Most women can travel safely until close to their due date. For most women, the ideal time to travel is in the middle of pregnancy. Problems are least likely to happen during this time. Our office recommends that patients do not travel at all in their ninth month, and that travel be restricted to within two to three hours from home during their eighth month.

### **Automobile Travel Tips:**

During pregnancy, many women have concerns about seat belts. There is no question that you are much better off wearing your seat belt during pregnancy. The baby is very well protected in the uterus from trauma, but car accidents are the most common source of trauma during pregnancy. The most common reason for fetal death is maternal death, and maternal death is much less likely in mothers who wear seat belts. Both lap and shoulder belts should be worn at all times. The lap belt should be worn low on the hips, not over the uterus. Also remember that after delivery, an approved car seat must be in your car in order to take your baby home from the hospital. We recommend you not sit with your legs crossed and that you get up to walk every two hours.

### **Air Travel Tips:**

People have concerns about flying during pregnancy. In general, there does not seem to be an increased risk for women who fly during pregnancy. Any woman who sits for long periods of time without getting up to walk is at risk for developing a blood clot in her legs. For this reason, on flights over two hours, you should get up, stretch your legs, and take a walk up and down the aisle. Because of this an aisle seat is usually advisable.

### **What can I do for cold and allergy symptoms?**

Colds are miserable. During pregnancy there is an increased concern. Many remedies can relieve symptoms at home, sometimes eliminating the need for an office visit.

- Increase fluids, especially water to two quarts a day.
- Get extra rest if possible.

- Use a cool mist vaporizer/humidifier at night. This moistens the air you breathe to keep secretions flowing.
- Saline gargles (one teaspoon of salt and ½ cup of warm water) every four hours while awake this will loosen the mucous in the back of the throat and relieve mild soreness.
- Any brand of saline nose drops (except regular *Afrin*® or *Neo-Synephrine*®) at bedtime and in the morning. This will help moisten secretions.
- Tylenol® (plain) two tablets every four hours (maximum of six tablets in 24 hours) if necessary for aches.
- Coughing can be relieved with one teaspoon of honey and 2-3 drops of lemon juice. Hold this in your mouth until the honey thins and then swallow. If coughing interrupts sleep or causes vomiting, call your doctor. You may try Robitussin DM®, an over the counter cough medication.
- Actifed® or Sudafed® may also be used for symptoms of congestion when taken as directed on the package.

### **What can I do for headaches during pregnancy?**

Headaches are common during pregnancy. Usually headaches do not signal a serious problem. How often they occur and how bad they are may vary. It is important to discuss with your health care team which medications you can use for headaches. You should contact your doctor if your headache does not go away, returns very often, is very severe, causes blurred vision or spots in front of your eyes, or is accompanied by nausea. You may use Tylenol® (acetaminophen) two regular tablets or one extra strength tablet for headaches.

### **What can YOU do to reduce or prevent heartburn?**

Indigestion is commonly called heartburn, but it does not mean anything is wrong with your heart. It is a burning feeling that starts in the stomach and seems to rise into the throat. It occurs when digested food from your stomach, which contains acid, is pushed up into your esophagus (the tube leading from the throat to the stomach). Liquids that you drink also take up space in your stomach, so they may also add to the problem.

Changes that take place in your body during pregnancy may worsen indigestion. Changes in your hormone levels slow digestion and relax the muscle that normally prevents the digested food and acids in your stomach from entering the esophagus. In addition, your growing uterus presses up on your stomach. To help relieve heartburn, try the following

- Eat five or six small meals a day instead of two or three large ones. A glass of fluid may be equal in volume to a small meal, so avoid drinking large amounts of fluids with meals.
- Avoid foods that cause gas, such as spicy or greasy foods.
- Do not eat or drink several hours before bedtime.
- Wait two hours after eating before exercising.
- Antacids may be helpful, such as Maalox ®, Tums ®, or Gaviscon ®. Liquid will be more effective than tablets. If the problem is frequent and only briefly relieved by antacids, speak with your doctor.

### **Are herbs and extra vitamins safe during pregnancy?**

No, your prenatal vitamins should be the only supplement used during pregnancy unless your provider specifically directs you to use an additional product.

### **What can I do for nausea and vomiting during pregnancy?**

The following suggestions may be useful:

- Remember “any calorie is a good calorie” so eat what stays down for you.
  - These foods may not be well tolerated: greasy or fried foods as they take longer to leave the stomach, very sweet foods, spicy hot foods, food with strong odors.
  - Eat smaller, more frequent meals. That is six small meals or snacks.
  - Drink fluids between meals, not with meals.
  - Eat foods that are at room temperature or cooler. Hot foods may trigger nausea.
  - Avoid mixing hot and cold foods at a meal, as it may trigger nausea
  - Avoid eating a room that is stuffy, too warm, or has cooking smells/odors that may disagree with you.
  - Wear loose fitting clothing
  - Drink beverages chilled or cold. Decaffeinated soda is often well tolerated. Don’t select diet soda, you need the calories right now.
  - Eat slowly and rest after meals. It is best to rest sitting in an upright position for about one hour after eating.
  - Dry toast, soda crackers, or dry pre-sweetened cereals may relieve periods of nausea.
  - Keep track of when you feel nauseated and what caused it.
  - If continued vomiting occurs, do not eat or drink anything until the vomiting has stopped. As you feel better, try some small amounts of clear liquids (broth, Jell-O ®, apple, grape or cranberry juice, and/or Popsicles ®)
  - Tart or salty foods such as lemons or pickles may help decrease nausea.
- To avoid the sight/smell of foods, eat meals out or have others bring prepared foods to you.

### **These are signs that you need to call your doctor**

- Unable to keep anything down for more than two days
- Fainting
- Vomiting blood
- Rib pain
- Jaundice (skin is greenish or yellow)
- Your weight drops more than five pounds in a week

### **What can I do to relieve constipation?**

At least half of all pregnant women seem to have problems with constipation. The reason for this may be changes in hormones that slow the movement of food through the digestive tract. Sometimes iron supplements may also cause constipation. During the last part of pregnancy, pressure on your rectum from your uterus may add to the problem. Here are some suggestions that may help:

- Drink plenty of fluids, at least 6-8 glasses of water each day. This includes 1-2 glasses of fruit juice, such as prune juice. Liquids such as coffee, tea and cola which make you go to the bathroom should be avoided.
- Eat foods high in fiber, such as raw fruits, vegetables and bran cereals.
- Exercise daily. Walking is the best form of exercise.

### **Are hemorrhoids common during pregnancy?**

Very often pregnant women who are constipated also have hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids are varicose (or swollen) veins of the rectum. They are often painful. Straining during bowel movements and having hard stools may make hemorrhoids worse and can sometimes cause them to protrude from the rectum.

Do not take drugstore cures while you are pregnant without first checking with your doctor or nurse. Hemorrhoids usually improve after the baby is born.

Several things can help give relief or avoid the problem in the first place:

- Avoid getting constipated
- Eat a high fiber diet
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Use Tucks ®, or over the counter wipe.

### **Is it safe to exercise and continue work during pregnancy?**

Exercise can help strengthen muscles used in labor and delivery and lessen some of the discomforts of pregnancy. It may give you more energy and make you feel better. The type of exercise you can do during pregnancy depends on your health and how active you were before you were pregnant. This is not a good time to take up a new or difficult sport. If you were active before pregnancy, you can continue to be within reason. If, for example you play tennis, you can still play unless you have special problems or feel very tired. A good “rule of thumb” is to limit exertion to about 2/3 of what you could do before pregnancy.

Most of the time, a healthy woman with no complications in her pregnancy can keep working until the end of her pregnancy. Some may need to make changes. If you are experiencing problems that you feel are related to your job, please discuss this at one of your appointments. Your family should be able to help you at home as fatigue increases at the end of your pregnancy.

### **Is it normal for swelling to occur?**

A certain amount of swelling (called edema) is normal during pregnancy. It occurs most often in the legs. Elevating the legs usually makes the swelling less by the next morning. Swelling can begin during the last few months of pregnancy, and it may occur more often in the summer. Let your doctor or nurse know if you have swelling in your hands or face, because this may be a sign of another problem. A clue that your hands are swollen is that your rings are too tight. Never take medication (water pills) for swelling unless they have been prescribed for you. Helpful hints to relieve symptoms:

- Elevate your legs when possible
- Rest in bed on your side
- Lie down with your legs raised on a small footstool or several pillows
- Do not wear stockings or socks that have a tight band of elastic around the legs
- If you must sit a lot on the job, stand up and move as often as possible
- Try not to stand still for long periods of time

### **Are leg cramps normal?**

In the last three months of pregnancy, you may find that you have more leg cramps. Get plenty of calcium (3 glasses of milk) and potassium (oranges or bananas). Stretching your legs before going to bed can help relieve cramps. Avoid pointing your toes when stretching or exercising.

### **Is it normal for my gums to bleed during pregnancy?**

During pregnancy, the extra hormones in your body may cause your gums to swell and bleed. Floss and brush your teeth regularly. Use a soft toothbrush. To keep your teeth in good shape, having a dental check-up early in pregnancy is a good idea to be sure your mouth is healthy. Local anesthesia, if needed, does not pose a risk during pregnancy. Dental x-rays should only be done if necessary and with your abdomen shielded.

### **Is it safe to continue to have *SEXUAL INTERCOURSE* during pregnancy?**

Some people worry about having intercourse during pregnancy. They may be afraid it will cause a miscarriage. For a healthy woman with a normal pregnancy, intercourse is safe into the last weeks of pregnancy. For your comfort, you and your partner may want to try different sexual positions. Your doctor may advise you to limit or avoid sex if there are signs or problems in your pregnancy.

### **Are yeast infections common during pregnancy?**

It is not uncommon to develop a yeast infection during pregnancy. If such an infection does occur, it is safe for you to use over-the-counter products such as Monistat ®.

### **If I am pregnant and a family member has or *has been exposed to chickenpox*, what should I do?**

Most adults are immune to chickenpox, either from having the disease or by forming immunity from a mild exposure. If you had chickenpox in the past, you and your baby are protected. If you are not sure, ask your doctor to check your immunity with a blood test. If this shows positive immunity, you are both protected. If it shows no immunity, you may be given an injection of Varicella Immune Globulin (VZIG) to prevent chickenpox. In order to be effective, this injection must be given within 72-hours of exposure.

### **May I color or perm my hair during pregnancy?**

Often pregnant women have concerns about safety of hair dyes and permanents during pregnancy. There is no scientific data on this question, but it seems unlikely that these types of exposures are harmful.

### **Are saunas, hot tubs, and tanning booths safe during pregnancy?**

The use of saunas, hot tubs, and tanning booths is not recommended during pregnancy. The extreme temperature could potentially damage the developing baby. Extremely hot baths are also not recommended during pregnancy. Bath temperature should be below 100° Fahrenheit.

### **Is it safe to paint during pregnancy?**

Latex paints manufactured before 1991 used small amounts of mercury as a preservative. There was some concern that this mercury could present a health hazard, so mercury is no longer used in latex paints. The fumes from latex paints are not felt to be a specific risk to a developing baby, but it is always wise to paint in a well ventilated area. The fumes from oil based paint, turpentine, paint thinner, etc., are best avoided by pregnancy women. Also, remember when painting to avoid the use of a ladder to reduce the risk of injuries due to a fall.