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Pregnancy - morning sickness

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Summary

- Around half to two-thirds of all pregnant women will experience morning sickness.
- Possible causes include high levels of hormones, blood pressure fluctuations and changes in carbohydrate metabolism.
- Severe morning sickness, called hyperemesis gravidarum, may require hospitalisation.
- Symptoms of morning sickness may be relieved by eating a few dry crackers before you get up in the morning, avoiding foods and smells that make you nauseous, drinking plenty of fluids and choosing high-carbohydrate and high-protein foods.

Around half to two-thirds of all pregnant women will experience morning sickness to some degree, particularly in the first trimester. The symptoms include nausea and vomiting. Morning sickness is typically at its worst early in the day, hence its name, but it can strike at any point during the day or night.

For most women, morning sickness begins around the fourth week of pregnancy and resolves by the 12th to 14th week. However, one in five women endures morning sickness into their second trimester, and an unfortunate few experience nausea and vomiting for the entire duration of their pregnancy.

In most cases, morning sickness doesn't harm the woman or the unborn child. However, severe morning sickness that includes weight loss and dehydration needs prompt medical attention.

Symptoms of morning sickness

Symptoms of morning sickness can include:

- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Psychological effects, such as depression and anxiety.

The myth of hysteria and morning sickness

Unrelenting morning sickness can have a profound effect on your quality of life, preventing you from working, socialising and looking after your other children.

Pregnant women enduring morning sickness report higher levels of psychological stress, including anxiety and depression. This prompted the false belief that morning sickness is purely psychosomatic, which means that the woman's fears and anxieties trigger her physical discomfort. However, there is no research to support these claims.

Possible causes of morning sickness

The cause of morning sickness remains a mystery, but it is thought a combination of physical and metabolic factors play a significant role, including:

- High levels of hormones, including oestrogen
- Fluctuations in blood pressure, particularly lowered blood pressure
- Altered metabolism of carbohydrates
- The enormous physical and chemical changes that pregnancy triggers.

Morning sickness and your baby

Some women are concerned that the action of vomiting may threaten their unborn baby. Vomiting and retching may strain the abdominal muscles and cause localised aching and soreness, but the physical mechanics of vomiting won't harm the baby. The fetus is perfectly cushioned inside its sac of amniotic fluid.

Numerous studies have discovered that moderate morning sickness is associated with a reduced risk of miscarriage. However, prolonged vomiting (that leads to dehydration and weight loss) can deprive your child of proper nutrition and increase the risk of your baby being underweight at birth.

If you have nausea and vomiting that will not stop, contact your doctor or midwife.

Severe morning sickness (hyperemesis gravidarum)

Severe morning sickness is known as hyperemesis gravidarum (HG), and can affect around one in 1,000 pregnant women. The symptoms of HG include repeated vomiting, weight loss and dehydration. Treatment usually involves hospitalisation, and the administering of intravenous liquids and nutrition.

The possible complications of untreated hyperemesis gravidarum include:

- Electrolyte imbalances

- Extreme depression and anxiety
- Malnourishment of the fetus
- Excessive strain on vital organs, including the liver, heart, kidneys and brain.

Managing morning sickness

Suggestions for coping with morning sickness include:

- Don't take drugs of any kind, unless your doctor knows you are pregnant and has prescribed specific medications.
- Eat a few dry crackers or plain sweet biscuits before getting out of bed in the morning.
- Don't eat anything that you suspect will make you nauseous. In general high-carbohydrate meals are well tolerated.
- Eat small meals regularly, as an empty stomach tends to trigger nausea.
- It may help to avoid cooking or preparing foods.
- Drink as much as you can manage. Sometimes sips of flat lemonade, diluted fruit juice, cordial, weak tea, ginger tea, clear soup or beef extract drinks are helpful. If none of these are bearable, try sucking on ice cubes.
- Vitamin B6 supplements can be useful, but doses above 200 mg per day can actually be harmful. Follow your doctor's advice.
- Consider acupressure or acupuncture on the wrist.
- Wear loose clothes that don't constrict your abdomen.
- Moving around may aggravate morning sickness. Rest whenever possible.

Seeing your doctor about morning sickness

Always seek medical advice if your morning sickness is severe, if you have lost a lot of weight quickly, or if you feel depressed or anxious. Treatment options can include drugs that won't harm your developing baby.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse

Things to remember

- Around half to two-thirds of all pregnant women will experience morning sickness.
- Possible causes include high levels of hormones, blood pressure fluctuations and changes in carbohydrate metabolism.
- Severe morning sickness, called hyperemesis gravidarum, may require hospitalisation.
- Symptoms of morning sickness may be relieved by eating a few dry crackers before you get up in the morning, avoiding foods and smells that make you nauseous, drinking plenty of fluids and choosing high-carbohydrate and high-protein foods.

[References](#)

- *Nausea and vomiting in pregnancy (morning sickness)*, 2012, The Royal Women's Hospital. [More information here](#).
- *Chan RL, Olshan AF, Savitz DA, et al.*, 2010, 'Severity and duration of nausea and vomiting symptoms in pregnancy and spontaneous abortion', *Human Reproduction*, vol. 25, no. 11, pp. 2907–2912. [More information here](#).

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Pregnancy and birth basics

- [Childbirth - pain relief options](#)

[Understanding your pain relief options can help you cope better with the pain of childbirth...](#)

- [Pregnancy – labour](#)

[Labour is divided into three stages. The first stage is dilation of the cervix from 0 to 10 cm, the second stage is birth of the baby, and the third stage is delivery of the placenta. Labour typically...](#)

- [Pregnancy - premature labour](#)

[Sometimes, babies arrive early. It's important to recognise premature labour, in case you and your baby need medical care...](#)

- [Contraception after giving birth](#)

[After having a baby, you need to choose an effective method of contraception if you don't want to have another baby straight away...](#)

- [If you want to get pregnant, timing is everything](#)

[If you are trying for a baby, to increase your chances of conceiving, it helps to know when you are at your most fertile, and when is the best time to have sex...](#)

- [Pregnancy testing](#)

[Sometimes, a home pregnancy test may be positive when a woman isn't pregnant...](#)

- [Folate for pregnant women](#)

[Even women who aren't planning to have a baby should increase their folate intake in case of unplanned pregnancy...](#)

- [Pregnancy - unplanned](#)

[When a woman does not want to become a parent, her pregnancy options may include abortion or adoption...](#)

- [Contraception - emergency contraception](#)

[It is best to take emergency contraception as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours of having unprotected sex, but it still works well within 96 hours \(four days\)...](#)

Stages of pregnancy

- [Baby due date](#)

[Pregnancy is calculated from the first day of your last period, not from the date of conception...](#)

- [Pregnancy - week by week](#)

[Pregnancy is counted as 40 weeks, starting from the first day of the mother's last menstrual period...](#)

- [Pregnancy - signs and symptoms](#)

[All women experience pregnancy differently, and you will experience different symptoms at different stages of your pregnancy...](#)

- [Planning for labour and birth](#)

[Some of the signs and symptoms of going into labour may include period-like cramps, backache, diarrhoea and contractions...](#)

- [Conceiving a baby](#)

[The odds of a young fertile couple conceiving by having sexual intercourse around the time of ovulation \(the release of the egg from the ovary\) are approximately one in five every month. Around nine...](#)

- [Pregnancy stages and changes](#)

[It's helpful to have an idea of how your body may react to the different stages of pregnancy. It also helps to know how pregnancy may affect your emotions and feelings...](#)

Fertility issues and options

- [Adoption](#)

[Adoption can give a secure family life to children who can't live with their birth family...](#)

- [Surrogacy](#)

[Surrogacy is a form of assisted reproductive treatment \(ART\) in which a woman carries a child within her uterus on behalf of another person or couple...](#)

- [If you want to get pregnant, timing is everything](#)

[If you are trying for a baby, to increase your chances of conceiving, it helps to know when you are at your most fertile, and when is the best time to have sex...](#)

- [Abortion](#)

[All women should have access to accurate information about abortion so they can make their own informed decisions...](#)

- [Age and fertility](#)

[Age affects the fertility of both men and women, and is the single biggest factor affecting a woman's chance to conceive and have a healthy baby...](#)

- [Infertility in men](#)

[A couple isn't suspected of fertility problems until they have tried and failed to conceive for one year...](#)

- [Infertility in women](#)

[The odds of a young fertile couple conceiving by having sexual intercourse around the time of ovulation are approximately one in five every month...](#)

- [Weight, fertility and pregnancy health](#)

[Compared with women in the healthy weight range, women who are carrying extra weight are less likely to conceive...](#)

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[Some foods should be avoided during pregnancy as they carry bacteria that could harm your unborn baby...](#)

- [Postnatal exercise](#)

[Always consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program...](#)

- [Pregnancy and your mental health](#)

[Finding out you are pregnant can be a very exciting time. But it can also make you feel uncomfortable, unwell, worried and make you wonder how you are going to cope. And it doesn't stop when the baby...](#)

- [Tests, scans and checks - pregnancy and labour](#)

[Tests can confirm your pregnancy and also monitor your baby's development in the womb...](#)

- [Alcohol and pregnancy](#)

[There's no safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy. It's safest to not drink at all during pregnancy, when trying to conceive, and while breastfeeding...](#)

- [Pregnancy and smoking](#)

[Smoking while pregnant exposes a woman and her unborn child to an increased risk of health problems...](#)

- [Immunisation and pregnancy](#)

[Immunisation can protect a woman and her unborn baby against many infectious diseases...](#)

- [Folate for pregnant women](#)

[Even women who aren't planning to have a baby should increase their folate intake in case of unplanned pregnancy...](#)

- [Pregnancy and exercise](#)

[Unless you have complications, you should be able to exercise throughout your pregnancy...](#)

- [Pelvic floor](#)

[Pelvic floor exercises are designed to improve muscle tone and prevent the need for corrective surgery...](#)

- [Pregnancy and diet](#)

[Good nutrition during pregnancy can help to keep you and your developing baby healthy...](#)

- [Pregnancy and travel](#)

[Travelling to developing nations is not encouraged during pregnancy, due to the risk of disease and the standard of medical facilities...](#)

- [Food poisoning - listeria](#)

[Listeria infection is uncommon but very dangerous for the elderly, people whose immune systems are not working properly and pregnant women and their unborn babies...](#)

Health concerns during pregnancy

- [Miscarriage and Stillbirth - Coming to terms \(video\)](#)

- [Pregnancy - bleeding problems](#)

[Bleeding from the vagina in early pregnancy happens in almost one in four pregnancies...](#)

- [Newborn bloodspot screening \(video\)](#)

[Every newborn baby in Australia is offered a newborn bloodspot screening test to identify those at risk for rare, but serious, medical conditions including PKU, hypothyroidism and cystic fibrosis...](#)

- [Placenta previa](#)

[Placenta previa means the placenta has implanted at the bottom of the uterus, over the cervix or close by...](#)

- [Placental abruption](#)

[Placental abruption means the placenta has detached from the wall of the uterus, starving the baby of oxygen and nutrients...](#)

- [Pregnancy - pre-eclampsia](#)

[There is no evidence that pre-eclampsia is caused by emotional stress, working too hard or not getting enough rest...](#)

- [Lupus and pregnancy](#)

[Lupus can be controlled with medications, so the majority of affected women are able to have children...](#)

- [HIV and women – having children](#)

[Women living with human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\), or women whose partner is HIV-positive, may wish to have children but feel concerned about the risk of transmission of the virus to themselves \(if...](#)

- [Alcohol and pregnancy](#)

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- [Pregnancy and smoking](#)

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- [Pregnancy - obstetric emergencies](#)

[An obstetric emergency may arise when a woman is pregnant, or during her delivery. In this case, extra care is needed. A woman may need a lot of tests and treatments, and extended hospital stays. She...](#)

- [Postnatal depression \(PND\)](#)

[Postnatal depression can happen either a few days or weeks after the birth, with a slow or sudden onset...](#)

- [Molar pregnancy](#)

[Most molar pregnancies are diagnosed when bleeding early in pregnancy prompts an ultrasound scan...](#)

- [Miscarriage](#)

[A range of feelings is normal after a miscarriage, and they often linger for some time...](#)

- [Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder \(FASD\)](#)

[The World Health Organization recommends that pregnant women should avoid alcohol...](#)

- [Asthma - pregnancy and breastfeeding](#)

[Pregnant women with asthma need to continue to take their asthma medication as it is important to the health of both mother and baby that the mother's asthma is well managed...](#)

- [Pregnancy and diet](#)

[Good nutrition during pregnancy can help to keep you and your developing baby healthy...](#)

- [Birth defects explained](#)

[The cause of birth defects is often unknown, speak to your GP if you are at increased risk of having a baby with a congenital anomaly...](#)

- [Ectopic pregnancy](#)

[Ectopic pregnancy is caused by a fertilised egg not being able to move through the fallopian tube...](#)

- [Diabetes - gestational](#)

[Gestational diabetes is diabetes that occurs during pregnancy and usually disappears when the pregnancy is over...](#)

Preparing for birth

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[It's very important for you and your baby to be looked after from the start of your pregnancy until after the birth of your baby...](#)

- [Pregnancy – labour](#)

[Labour is divided into three stages. The first stage is dilation of the cervix from 0 to 10 cm, the second stage is birth of the baby, and the third stage is delivery of the placenta. Labour typically...](#)

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[Sometimes, babies arrive early. It's important to recognise premature labour, in case you and your baby need medical care...](#)

- [Pregnancy - packing for hospital](#)

[Packing for hospital is an exciting part of preparing for the birth of your baby...](#)

- [Planning for labour and birth](#)

[Some of the signs and symptoms of going into labour may include period-like cramps, backache, diarrhoea and contractions...](#)

- [Twins - identical and fraternal](#)

[Multiple births are more common due to the advancing average age of mothers and the rise in assisted reproductive techniques...](#)

Preparing for a newborn

- [Breastfeeding - the first days](#)

[Let your baby feed as much as they want in the first few days to help establish good breastfeeding patterns...](#)

- [Breastfeeding - when to start](#)

[Breastfeeding within the first hour after birth allows your baby to behave instinctively and breastfeed with little intervention...](#)

- [Alcohol and pregnancy](#)

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[With low levels of vitamin K, some babies can have severe bleeding into the brain, causing significant brain damage...](#)

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[Even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and recommendation, your child still needs close supervision...](#)

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