
Nausea and Vomiting

Adapted from Pomegranate Midwives

Only about 15% of pregnant people *don't* suffer from nausea at some time during their pregnancy. Since each pregnant person is different and each pregnancy is different, the severity will vary, although nausea does tend to get worse with each pregnancy. More than half of pregnant people will also have vomiting. However, nausea can still be quite debilitating even without ongoing vomiting.

What causes nausea?

The cause of nausea during pregnancy is still unclear. However, it is believed that nausea may be due to, in part, the many physical changes taking place in the body, especially the higher levels of hormones during early pregnancy.

How long will it last?

Nausea usually starts between 5 and 6 weeks of pregnancy and by 7 weeks, it usually reaches its worst point. Although common in the morning, “morning sickness” can actually last all day, or be worse in the evening. For 80% of those that experience nausea, it gradually lessens as the pregnancy continues, with more and more nausea-free days until it ceases completely after 12 weeks – although physical or emotional stresses can cause temporary relapses. The other 20% will have nausea for a longer period of time, some even until the end of pregnancy.

Is it dangerous to me or my baby?

Nausea, especially if severe, can be emotionally draining. Many pregnant people find that it interferes with usual daily activities, making it necessary to find ways to cope. But the large majority of the time nausea isn't physically harmful to the pregnant person or the baby. If you were healthy before you started pregnancy, your body and your baby will draw on your existing nutritional reserves.

What if I can't keep anything down?

About 1% of pregnant people suffer from incredibly overwhelming nausea and/or excessive vomiting in pregnancy, a condition called “hyperemesis gravidarum”. In such cases, the lack of food, fluids and nutrients may be quite harmful to their health, and eventually the well-being of their baby, if left untreated. Initial treatment usually includes IV fluids, as dehydration makes the condition worse, which in turn increases the amount of nausea, vomiting and fluid loss; longer term treatment usually involves various drug prescription.

Nausea Survival Strategies

THE BASICS

Low blood sugar

- Having low blood sugar can cause or worsen nausea, so eat small, frequent meals.
- Carry snacks such as raw almonds.
- When you first wake up, eat a snack, and then rest for 15 minutes before getting out of bed.
- Keep a few crackers or a bowl of nuts in the bathroom, so you can keep your blood sugar up by snacking during those middle of the night trips.
- Until your nausea decreases, eat according to your cravings – better to eat something, than nothing at all.

Carbs & Proteins

- Eat protein for sustained energy. Try some just before bed to avoid morning nausea.
- Go for complex carbs, as refined carbs can quickly cause a blood sugar low.
- Some people find carbs (crackers, dry toast, popcorn, granola bars) more relieving, other prefer proteins (nuts, cheese, peanut butter).

Flavours, Smells, Textures

- Pregnant people may crave certain flavors: salty, sweet, sour. Find what works for you.
- Smelling citrus fruit – oranges and lemons – can help. Eating citrus also helps your body to efficiently absorb iron.
- Keeping saliva flowing by sucking on something sour can help.
- Avoid spicy, fatty and fried foods.
- Try eating food cold, as it may not smell as strong as when hot. Try popsicles.
- Minimize cooking smells.
- The smells of coffee and red meat are often triggers.

Fluids

- Don't let dehydration make your nausea worse: try to drink 2 litres a day.
- Add a dash of sea salt plus a dash of lemon or cranberry juice – all of these help speed up digestion.
- Drinks that lessen nausea count towards your 2 litres: ginger tea, ginger ale, anything bubbly like sparkling water or seltzer.
- Caffeine counts against your 2 litres, as it causes greater dehydration – drink an extra cup of water for every cup of caffeine or ounce of chocolate.
- Avoid sodas, as the high sugar content will likely make your nausea worse.
- Note – commercial sports drinks are full of sugar, often as much as soda.

Indigestion

- Avoid letting your stomach get fully empty
- Don't take supplements on an empty stomach.
- Try digestive teas if indigestion, constipation or diarrhea is associated with your nausea: fennel, mint, chamomile, etc.
- Eat foods with natural enzymes and probiotics, like yogurt with live cultures. Or take a probiotic supplement.
- Take digestive enzymes at mealtime, such as papain and bromelain.
- Try activated charcoal for a "sour" stomach - 2 capsules when nauseous, up to twice a day.

Stress

- Physical stress can make nausea worse.
 - Avoid warm places as feeling hot can add to nausea.
 - Being tired makes nausea worse. Focus on getting more sleep, including napping.
- Emotional stress can make nausea worse. And nausea can cause emotional distress!
 - If your work is stressful, consider taking some time from work, or adjust your work hours, if you can.
 - Consider seeing a counselor, especially someone who is familiar with helping pregnant people navigate the psychological and emotional challenges of serious nausea.

Exercise

- CO₂ buildup in the blood contributes to nausea but can be reduced with cardiovascular activity like walking and swimming.
- Exercise in fresh air seems to be especially helpful.

Vitamins

- Try 25mg of Vitamin B6, up to 6 per day.
- The iron in daily multi-vitamins can make nausea worse. Take vitamins with food or just before bed. If this doesn't help, then decrease or stop taking daily vitamins until your nausea is gone. Vitamins are supposed to fill the nutrient gaps in your diet – if you eat worse because of increased nausea, then they are not helping. Continue to take folic acid alone on a daily basis.

Ginger

- Take 250 mg capsules up to four times a day, or 5-6 cups of fluid per day. Try ginger ale, ginger beer, ginger tea, candied ginger or ginger-lemonade.

Aromatherapy

- Many essential oils are off-limits in pregnancy. However, smelling lavender and/or citrus essential oils may help. Try putting some in a bath.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Acupuncture

- Research has shown acupuncture to be effective. Look for a practitioner with experience in treating pregnant people.

Counselling

- Research has shown serious nausea to be a trigger for pregnancy anxiety and/or depression.
- Find a counsellor that is experienced at helping pregnant people cope with nausea. You may want to look for ways to connect virtually if you are too sick to come to an appointment.

Medications

- Diclectin is a medication considered safe for treating nausea in pregnancy. It is a combination of Vitamin B6 and an antihistamine. It can have uncomfortable side effects such as dry mouth or sleepiness, so it is usually only used to treat serious nausea. Ask your care provider for more info and/or a prescription.
- There are further medications that may be suitable if Diclectin doesn't work well enough to control your nausea. Speak to your care provider about these options.
- For those suffering from severe nausea (Hyperemesis Gravidarum) check out this [Medication handout](#).

Hyperemesis Gravidarum

- If you are experiencing debilitating and extreme nausea and vomiting, check out the HER foundation for helpful resources and support: <https://www.hyperemesis.org/>