

# Nausea and Vomiting During Pregnancy



## Do all women have nausea or vomiting during pregnancy?

About one in 4 pregnant women have only mild nausea. Three of every 10 pregnant women have nausea that is bad enough to interfere with their daily lives. Half of all pregnant women have both nausea and vomiting during the first months of pregnancy. Nausea and vomiting during pregnancy tends to be the worst at 8 to 10 weeks after your last menstrual period. It usually goes away by 12 to 16 weeks after your last period. Nausea and vomiting during pregnancy is often called “morning sickness” but can occur all day long or at any time in the day or night.

## What causes nausea and vomiting during pregnancy?

The cause of nausea and vomiting during pregnancy is not known for sure. Changes in hormone levels may be involved. If your mother had morning sickness when she was pregnant, you may be more likely to have nausea and vomiting during pregnancy. A history of motion sickness or stomach problems before you got pregnant may be another risk factor. Nausea during pregnancy is worse if you are dehydrated (there is not enough fluid in your body) or if the level of sugar in your blood is low from not eating often enough.

## Are nausea and vomiting during pregnancy dangerous?

Mild nausea and vomiting may make you feel awful, but it will not hurt you or your baby. You can talk to your health care provider about ways to make you feel better if nausea and or vomiting is making it hard for you to do your normal activities. Lots of vomiting that keeps you from keeping any food down is rare, but severe vomiting can cause health problems. You should call your health care provider if any of the following happen:

- You are not able to keep any liquids or foods down for 24 hours
- You are vomiting several times a day or after every meal
- You have abdominal pain, difficulty urinating, or a fever
- You do not urinate as often as usual and your urine is dark in color
- You are weak, dizzy, or faint when you stand up
- You do not gain weight or you lose weight in a week

## How are nausea and vomiting treated?

Nausea or vomiting during pregnancy is treated in 3 steps:

1. Simple diet changes in what you eat and how often you eat may lessen nausea and help you avoid vomiting. This is all it takes for many women.
2. If diet changes are not enough, you can try eating ginger or using acupuncture bands. Both have been shown to decrease nausea in research studies.
3. If the nausea and/or vomiting are making it hard to do your usual activities, your health care provider can prescribe medication.

Your health care provider can talk with you about how often you have nausea and are vomiting then help you decide which of the following ways to treat nausea and vomiting will be best for you.

### Step One: Lifestyle and Diet Changes

- Drink small amounts of fluids often all day long. Drinking a small amount at one time will also help the nausea lessen. Cold drinks may make you feel better than hot drinks will.
- Eat small meals every 2 to 3 hours. Do not wait to be hungry or thirsty before you eat or drink.
- Eat something plain like crackers, toast, or cereal in the morning. Some women find it helps to eat something before getting out of bed. Avoid eating foods that have strong odors.
- Avoid foods that are greasy, fried, spicy, or very hot.
- Try eating foods that are high in carbohydrates, such as potatoes, noodles, rice, or toast.



- Do not lie down right after eating.
- Some women say dairy products like yogurt are helpful, but this does not work for every woman.
- Prenatal vitamins may make your nausea worse. If you take your prenatal vitamin at night or with food, it may not make you nauseated. Your provider can also help you find a vitamin that does not make your nausea worse. Vitamins that do not have iron in them are less likely to cause your stomach to be upset. Children's vitamins that have folic acid can also be used. If you stop taking a prenatal multivitamin, you should take one tablet of folic acid daily (0.4 mg, which is 400 micrograms per day). Folic acid tablets will not worsen nausea.

### Step Two: Treatments that Do Not Use Medications

#### Ginger

Ginger has been used for treating nausea since ancient times and can lessen nausea. Ginger root tea, ginger gum, ginger snaps, ginger syrup added to water, ginger ale, and all other forms of ginger are safe to use in pregnancy. You can also buy ginger capsules at a drug store. The dose of ginger that has been studied for nausea and vomiting in pregnancy is 1 gram per day. Some forms of ginger like tea or cookies do not list the dose. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist how often you should take ginger products that do not have the dose of ginger listed.

#### Acupressure Bands

Seabands are wristbands with a pressure point placed on the inside of your wrist. They are often used for motion sickness. Some women find them helpful for nausea during pregnancy, and they are safe.

### Step Three: Medication

There are several different types of nausea medicines that work well and are safe for you and your baby. Because nausea and vomiting is caused by different “triggers” in your body, you and your health care provider can work together to find the medicine that is right for you. There are both over-the-counter and prescription medicines that can be used if your nausea and vomiting are severe.

#### Over-The-Counter Medication

Over-the-counter medications for motion sickness should not be taken during pregnancy unless recommended by your health care provider. Many women have found that vitamin B6 is helpful for making mild nausea better. Vitamin B6 does not help stop vomiting. Your health care provider can help you choose the dose and how often to take vitamin B6 if you want to try it.

#### Prescription Medication

If your nausea and vomiting continues after trying lifestyle and diet changes and over-the-counter medications or you are vomiting frequently, you may need a prescription medication. There are several different prescription medicines that have been studied and found to be safe for you and your baby. Your health care provider can talk with you about these medicines.

#### For More Information

##### Motherisk

Nausea and Vomiting Helpline (800) 436-8477

<http://www.motherisk.org/women/morningSickness.jsp>

##### MedlinePlus: Morning Sickness

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003119.htm>

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