

Nausea and Vomiting of Pregnancy

Introduction

More than half of all pregnant women suffer from nausea and vomiting during their pregnancy. Since each woman is different and each pregnancy is different, the severity of nausea and vomiting of pregnancy (NVP) will vary from woman to woman.

What causes NVP?

No one knows exactly what causes the nausea of pregnancy. Most researchers believe it's a combination of the many physical changes taking place in your body such as the higher levels of hormones during early pregnancy.

How long will morning sickness last?

Nausea and vomiting usually begin around the 6th week of pregnancy. Although common in the morning, "morning sickness" can actually happen at any time of the day. For 80% of sufferers, this condition stops around the 12th week of pregnancy although queasiness can come and go throughout pregnancy. The other 20% will suffer from nausea and vomiting for a longer period of time. Some women may even have the condition until the end of their pregnancy.

Most women who suffer from NVP will see their condition interfere with usual daily activities. Many will have to change their daily schedule in some way in order to cope with their condition.

The health effects of nausea and vomiting of pregnancy

Most cases of nausea and vomiting in early pregnancy aren't harmful to the mother and her unborn child. While short-term dietary deficiencies do not appear to have any harmful effects on pregnancy outcome, severe and persistent NVP symptoms can affect your health.

For most women, the feelings of nausea and the episodes of vomiting decrease at some point during the day so that they feel hungry again and can keep food down. However, if you are so sick that you are missing meals day after day, your baby may not be getting all the daily nutrients to grow as healthy as he or she can.

What if I just can't keep anything down?

About 1% of pregnant women in Canada (some 4,000 women per year) will suffer from excessive vomiting in pregnancy called "hyperemesis gravidarum". In such cases, the lack of food, fluids and nutrients may be harmful to their health and the well-being of their baby. If left untreated, severe cases of NVP can lead to dehydration.

Dehydration happens when the body does not have as many fluids as it should. This may be caused by losing too many fluids or not drinking enough. Severe cases of dehydration may require intravenous fluids and vitamin supplementation from the hospital. Seek medical attention if you suffer from signs of dehydration such as infrequent urination or dark yellow urine. NVP can be difficult to control; the sooner you are diagnosed and begin treatment, the more likely you will be able to avoid severe symptoms.

Helpful tips to control nausea and vomiting:

DIET - Food

- When you first wake up, eat a few crackers and then rest for 15 minutes before getting out of bed.
- Get up slowly and do not lie down right after eating.
- Eat small meals or snacks often so your stomach does not become empty (for example, every 2 hours). Try not to skip meals.
- Do not hesitate to eat whatever you feel like eating and eat whenever you want to. However, it is best to avoid cooking or eating spicy, fatty and fried foods.
- If cooking odours bother you, open the windows and turn on the stove fan. If possible, ask someone else to cook the meals.



- Try eating cold food instead of hot (cold food may not smell as strong as hot food).
- Sniffing lemons or ginger can sometimes relieve an upset stomach.
- Eating salty potato chips can help settle the stomach enough to eat a meal.

DIET - Drinks

- Drink small amounts of fluids frequently during the day.
- Avoid drinking fluids during meals and immediately before or after a meal.

Food Ideas to Help Relieve Nausea

Salty:	Chips, pretzels
Tart/Sweet:	Pickles, lemonade
Earthy:	Brown rice, mushroom soup, peanut butter
Crunchy:	Celery sticks, apple slices, nuts
Bland:	Mashed potatoes, gelatin, broth
Soft:	Bread, noodles
Sweet:	Cake, sugary cereals
Fruity:	Fruity popsicles, watermelon
Liquid:	Juice, seltzer, sparkling water, ginger ale
Dry:	Crackers

LIFESTYLE - Rest

- Get plenty of rest since nausea tends to worsen when a woman is tired. Try napping during the day. Typically, a pregnant woman needs more sleep in the first three months of pregnancy.
- You may need to take some time off work or make other arrangements for household chores and childcare.
- Enlist the support of friends and family.

LIFESTYLE - Other

- Get plenty of fresh air and avoid warm places as feeling hot can add to nausea.
- Acupressure wrist bands or acupuncture can be beneficial for some women. If you are considering acupuncture, consult your healthcare professional and look for an experienced and licensed acupuncturist.
- Try ginger, an alternative remedy thought to settle the stomach. Dosages of up to 250 mg four times a day appear to be safe.
- Try taking your prenatal vitamins (one with a lower amount of iron if that mineral makes your nausea worse) with food or just before bed. If multivitamins make your nausea worse, take folic acid alone on a daily basis.

Note: So called “natural products” are often used under the assumption that they are safe. However, the safety and effectiveness of these treatments have not yet been proven and it is important to note that very few of these products have been properly studied in pregnancy. Ask your healthcare provider before taking herbal remedies.

Medications

Although it is generally wise to stay away from over-the-counter medications during pregnancy, there is a safe and effective prescription medication that can help women when nausea and vomiting affect their well-being and daily activities.

Doxylamine succinate/pyridoxine HCl (Diclectin®), a combination of vitamin B6 and an antihistamine called doxylamine, is the only medication approved in Canada for the treatment of nausea and vomiting in pregnancy. Its safety and effectiveness for the treatment of NVP is recognized by Health Canada. Its safety throughout pregnancy has been long established and studies have shown no evidence that harmful effects are experienced by babies.

If Diclectin® does not cure your symptoms, other medications may be prescribed by your health care provider.

Who can help you with your NVP?

If you have NVP and are looking for support and counselling, you should talk to your healthcare provider.

You may also contact the Motherisk NVP Helpline toll free at 1-800-436-8477 for ways to deal with morning sickness. For information on the safety and risks of medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding, call the Motherisk Program at (416) 813-6780 or visit www.motherisk.org.

Final thoughts

There are many ways of lessening or eliminating nausea and there is no reason for women to feel guilty about treating these symptoms. Your healthcare provider can help you control the nausea and vomiting so that you can have a pleasant and healthy pregnancy.

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