



The A to Z's of Your Pregnancy



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Congratulations—having a baby is one of the most exciting adventures in life. We are pleased you chose Ochsner to share this important time with you and your family. Although every person and every birthing experience is unique, this A to Z Guide will help inform you of the most common changes to expect during your pregnancy.



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A Allergies

Many women have seasonal allergies. If you experience seasonal allergies during pregnancy, you can take Benadryl®, Claritin®, or Zyrtec®. If you have an allergic skin reaction, contact your doctor.

B Backache

Almost all pregnant women have backaches during their pregnancy. Backaches are often related to stretching of the ligaments that hold the uterus in place. Backaches can also be caused by stretching of the back muscles as they support the weight of the baby as it grows. Here are some comfort measures:

- Maternity belt
- Warm heating pad
- Warm bath
- Regular strength Tylenol
- Massage

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the best nutrition for your baby. Breastfeeding also protects your baby from different illnesses. Studies have shown that breastfed babies get sick less often. When they reach school age, breastfed babies perform better in school. Newborns tolerate breast milk better than formula. Breastfeeding also decreases your bleeding after delivery by shrinking your uterus. It is a natural process, but it often takes some time for you and your new infant to get the hang of things. Here are some helpful hints:

- Try breastfeeding as soon as your baby is born. Beginning immediately increases the success of breastfeeding and creates a bond between you and your baby.
- Do not get discouraged! Most women don't produce a significant amount of milk until 3 to 4 days after delivery.
- Continue to take your prenatal vitamins while breastfeeding.
- Stay well hydrated by drinking 8 to 10 glasses of water every day.

While breastfeeding, if you have fever, redness of the breasts, or fullness that is not relieved by pumping or expressing your milk, contact your doctor. Your doctor should discuss breastfeeding with you before delivery. Breastfeeding is not recommended for women with certain medical conditions.

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Breast tenderness

Breast tenderness is common in pregnancy, especially in the beginning. This tenderness is related to the hormone changes that occur in the first trimester. Your breasts may become larger. You may also notice darkening of the nipples. As your pregnancy continues, it is not uncommon to produce milk, even before you deliver. To relieve breast tenderness and heaviness, wear a good support bra.

C

Colds and congestion

Nasal congestion during pregnancy can be normal. To relieve congestion, you may use Ocean® nasal spray, a saline nasal spray, or Sudafed® sparingly. Do not use antihistamines because they may make the congestion worse. You can also try using a humidifier.

Constipation

Constipation is very common throughout all stages of pregnancy. Here are some tips to overcome constipation:

- Drink plenty of water: 8 to 10 glasses of water per day.
- Eat plenty of foods that are rich in fiber, such as raw fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads, and cereals. Avoid cheese and bananas because they may slow down your bowel movements.
- Use Metamucil® or Citrucel® as needed.
- Try a stool softener such as Colace® or Dulcolax®.

If you go 5 days without a bowel movement or have significant pain, contact your doctor.

Contractions

Cramping or Braxton Hicks contractions are common in the second and third trimesters. Make sure you stay well hydrated. You may also find comfort from a warm bath. If you experience contractions every 5 minutes apart or closer for 2 hours, come to labor and delivery for assessment.

Cough

For relief from cough, you can try regular strength Robitussin®, Chloraseptic® spray, or any throat lozenges.

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Cramping

Women commonly have abdominal cramping throughout their pregnancy. Cramping associated with pregnancy is often described as feeling similar to menstrual cramps. Early in the pregnancy, mild abdominal cramping is due to the growing uterus. Cramping can also be due to round ligament pain (defined later in this handout). In the late second trimester and third trimester, you may experience cramping due to Braxton Hicks. These are contractions of the uterus, but they are not associated with labor. They can be worse with activity or when you are dehydrated. Make sure you drink 8 to 10 glasses of water every day. If the cramping becomes more intense or you experience the cramping every 5 minutes apart or closer for 2 hours, contact your doctor immediately.

D Dental procedures

Bleeding gums are common during pregnancy. However, if you have painful gums or teeth, consult your dentist. Most dental procedures can be performed safely during pregnancy with a local anesthetic. Keep your teeth healthy during pregnancy by brushing twice a day, using dental floss, and having regular dental exams and cleanings.

Diarrhea

Your gastrointestinal tract may be more sensitive during pregnancy. That sensitivity can cause diarrhea after you eat certain foods. Relieve diarrhea with Imodium® or Kaopectate®. Stay well hydrated. If you have blood or mucus in your stool or the diarrhea persists for more than 48 hours, contact your doctor.

Diet

Maintain a healthy diet throughout pregnancy. Include grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, meats, and beans. Avoid fatty, greasy, and fried foods. Eat small frequent meals throughout the day and NEVER skip breakfast. Some foods you want to avoid during pregnancy:

- Avoid soft cheeses such as brie, Gouda, and feta. These cheeses are soft because they are not completely pasteurized. They can harbor bacteria that can be harmful to your baby.
- While fish has omega acids that are good for the pregnancy, you want to avoid shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish because they can be high in mercury. Limit canned tuna and salmon to once per week.
- Avoid packaged meat such as ham, bologna, and hotdogs. These products can also harbor bacteria that can be harmful. Eat them only if they are fully cooked.
- Avoid raw meat and raw fish such as sushi.

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Dizziness/faintness

During pregnancy, it is common to become dizzy or lightheaded when you stand for long periods or change positions, such as moving from sitting to standing. Dizziness usually occurs in the second trimester. Make sure you drink plenty of water, and avoid standing still for long periods of time. If dizziness does not improve, contact your doctor immediately.

E *Exercise*

You can and should exercise during pregnancy. However, you should not start a new exercise routine. When you are exercising, your heart rate should not exceed 140 beats per minute. Do not lift anything heavier than 10 to 15 pounds. Do not exercise for more than 15 minutes in areas that are hot, humid, or not well ventilated. After the fourth month of pregnancy, avoid exercises that require you to lie on your back. Avoid exercises that will cause trauma to your abdomen, such as horseback riding, downhill skiing, wrestling, etc. Swimming is permissible, but diving is not. If you experience excessive contractions, bleeding, loss of fluid, or decreased fetal movement, contact your doctor immediately.

G *Gas and bloating*

Gas and bloating are common during pregnancy. Here are some helpful hints:

- Pay attention to the foods that give you gas and avoid those foods.
- Eat small, frequent meals instead of big, heavy meals.
- Avoid fried, fatty, and greasy foods.
- Avoid constipation (see Constipation).

H *Hair*

Often, the hormonal changes during pregnancy cause your hair to break. You may also notice increased shedding during the post-partum period. These changes are normal. Relaxer, perms, and hair dyes can be applied after the first trimester.

Headaches

Headaches can be common during pregnancy. There are different types of headaches:

- Tension headaches are characterized by pain usually in the back and sides of the head that becomes worse with stress. Tension headaches are best treated by taking regular strength acetaminophen, drinking plenty of water, and resting.

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Headaches (cont.)

- You may experience headaches associated with pain under the eyes or around your face. These are most likely sinus headaches and are best relieved with regular strength acetaminophen, alternating cold and warm compresses, or a humidifier.
- Migraine headaches are often accompanied by nausea and vomiting. Light and sound make migraine pain worse. If you experience this type of headache, consult your doctor.

Any time you experience a headache associated with blurry vision or a headache that is not relieved by acetaminophen, consult your doctor immediately. This headache may be caused by elevated blood pressure.

Heartburn

During pregnancy, the stomach does not empty as quickly as it does when you are not pregnant. This increases the production of gastric juices that can lead to heartburn. Here are some helpful hints:

- Avoid spicy foods.
- Remain upright for at least one hour after eating.
- Use antacids such as Tums® or Rolaids®.
- Take over-the-counter Zantac® twice per day.

If your heartburn is not relieved by these modifications, contact your doctor.

Hemorrhoids

As the pregnancy continues and you experience more pelvic pressure, you may also develop hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids can be painful. Here are some hints to help the pain:

- Avoid constipation (see Constipation).
- Use hemorrhoid creams such as Annusol® or Preparation H®.
- Use astringents such as Tucks® Medicated Pads.

If pain persists or you experience excessive bleeding, contact your doctor.

L

Leg cramps

Muscle spasms in the calf, especially at night, are common during pregnancy. Try massaging the calves, stretching, or applying a warm heating pad. If your leg cramps do not improve or only occur in one leg, contact your doctor.

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M

Miscarriage

Unfortunately, miscarriage is the unhappy side of pregnancy, and it is common. Miscarriage is not your fault or your partner's fault. Most of the time, miscarriage results from the genetic information not coming together in the right way. It will not affect your next pregnancy. However, if you have had two or more miscarriages, discuss this with your doctor. Also, you should be aware of the signs of miscarriage:

- Bleeding – Some bleeding during pregnancy is a result of the increased dilation of blood vessels. However, if you have bleeding that soaks through a sanitary pad, contact your doctor.
- Cramping – As stated earlier, cramping can be a sign of growth. However, if you have cramping associated with bleeding, contact your doctor.

Pregnancy loss is a difficult life event. If you are having difficulty coping, consult your doctor for more information on the Little Footprints Grief Support Group offered here at Ochsner.

Mood swings

Mood swings are a normal part of pregnancy. They are caused by pregnancy hormones. You may be happy one minute and sad the next. These are normal changes. However, if you are extremely sad, cry a lot, cannot sleep, are not eating, or if you feel like hurting yourself or someone else, consult your doctor immediately!

N

Nausea

Nausea and vomiting are common during the early stages of pregnancy. These symptoms usually occur at the beginning of pregnancy and resolve in the second trimester. Here are some helpful hints:

- Eat crackers or dry toast before sitting up in the morning.
- Avoid sudden movements. Get out of bed slowly.
- Eat small frequent meals. Avoid fatty, greasy, and spicy foods.
- Stay hydrated. If you cannot tolerate water, try Sprite.
- Try ginger in any form: ginger ale, ginger snaps, or ginger tablets.
- Take 25 mg of Vitamin B6 twice a day with half a Unisom® tablet.

If your vomiting persists for more than 24 hours, contact your doctor for further advice.

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Nosebleeds/bleeding gums

Because of the increased dilation of the blood vessels during pregnancy, nosebleeds and bleeding gums can occur. These conditions do not usually require medical treatment. However, if the bleeding persists, contact your doctor.

P

Palpitations

Palpitations can occur during pregnancy. You may feel as though your heart is racing or skipping a beat. While palpitations can be normal, if they are associated with chest pain, shortness of breath, or fatigue, contact your doctor immediately.

Prenatal visits

Prenatal care is essential to having a happy, healthy pregnancy. Whether you choose a physician, a nurse practitioner, or a nurse midwife, your provider will be the guide to a healthy baby. During your prenatal visit, your provider will listen to the baby's heart and make sure your baby is growing appropriately. You will have different laboratory tests performed, including testing your blood type, checking for anemia, and testing for different infections. You will need to see your provider every 4 weeks until you are 28 weeks pregnant. Then you will see your provider every 2 weeks until you are 35 weeks pregnant. After 35 weeks, you will see your provider every week until you deliver.

R

Round ligament pain

Two ligaments come from the front of the uterus and end in the vagina. These are known as the round ligaments. As the uterus grows and stretches, these ligaments stretch. Pain is often associated with this stretching. It can be a sharp, stabbing pain usually in the lower pelvis or the vagina. The pain is worse when you move from sitting to standing or walk for long periods. Round ligament pain can be helped or avoided by the following:

- Using a warm (NOT HOT) heating pad
- Taking a warm bath
- Taking regular strength Tylenol®
- Wearing a maternity belt
- Staying well hydrated by drinking water

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S

Salivation and spitting

Some women experience increased salivation during pregnancy. This condition is known as ptyalism. Decrease your saliva by using nonmedicated throat lozenges, sucking candy such as peppermint, or eating crackers. Ptyalism may resolve by the second trimester or may last throughout the pregnancy.

Sex

In most cases, it is safe to continue sexual intercourse throughout pregnancy. You may find a decreased desire during pregnancy, and this is normal. You may find an increased desire during pregnancy, and this is also normal. Avoid sex if you have bleeding, your water bag is ruptured, or you have been diagnosed with a placenta previa or an incompetent cervix.

Shortness of breath

Toward the end of pregnancy, many women experience shortness of breath. The uterus is enlarging and the diaphragms are unable to lower, making it feel like you are unable to catch your breath. However, if you experience wheezing or dizziness, or if you are unable to catch your breath, contact your doctor immediately.

Skin changes

Hormone changes throughout the pregnancy affect the melanocytes and cause darkening of several areas of the body. Some women's faces darken, causing a pregnancy mask. This condition is known as melasma. Some women experience darkening of the areola around the nipple. Often, a dark line appears on the abdomen from the belly button to the pubic symphysis. This line is known as the linea nigra. Stretch marks can also form during pregnancy. Most of these skin changes will fade after pregnancy. You may minimize the appearance of stretch marks by using cocoa butter lotion, Vitamin E oil, or other over-the-counter products.

Swelling

As the uterus gets larger, it lies on the inferior vena cava, diminishing the return of blood flow. This often leads to swelling in your ankles and feet, and sometimes in your hands. Swelling in your hands may lead to a condition known as carpal tunnel syndrome, resulting in pain in your wrists.

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Swelling (cont.)

You can improve swelling with these techniques:

- Avoid salty foods.
- Elevate your feet higher than the level of your heart.
- Avoid standing for long periods.
- Wear loose clothes.
- Wear wrist braces, especially at night, for carpal tunnel syndrome.

If you experience swelling in your face, headaches, blurry vision, or swelling in one calf only, contact your doctor immediately.

T

Tiredness

Fatigue during pregnancy can be normal. Fatigue is most pronounced at the very beginning of pregnancy and again towards the end. Make sure you get adequate sleep and rest. While most of the time fatigue is normal, it can also be a sign of anemia. Consult your doctor for more information.

Travel

Travel during pregnancy is safe. However, you should always check with your doctor before traveling. During pregnancy, you are at increased risk for blood clots, so you should walk around every 1-2 hours during travel. Always wear a seatbelt when traveling in the car. Place the shoulder strap across your chest and place the waist belt underneath your belly. You should avoid flying after 35 weeks.

U

Urinary symptoms

Frequent urination during pregnancy is normal. Hormone changes at the beginning of pregnancy increase the frequency of urination. Pressure from the uterus and the baby at the end of pregnancy decreases the capacity of the bladder—also leading to frequent urination. Because of the increased pressure, it is not uncommon to lose urine unexpectedly. However, if you experience burning when you urinate, blood in your urine, fever, chills, or pain associated with urination, contact your doctor.

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V

Vaginal discharge

Hormonal changes during pregnancy can cause vaginal discharge of varying consistencies. However, if you have itching, irritation, or a foul odor, contact your doctor.

Varicose veins

Varicose veins occur because of dilation of the blood vessels during pregnancy. Varicose veins may occur on the legs or even the vulva. Avoid standing for long periods, elevate your feet at night, and wear support hose during the day.

W

Weight gain

While you should not diet during pregnancy, there is an expected amount of weight you should gain during your pregnancy. It is based on your pre-pregnancy weight.

Pre-pregnancy Body Mass Index (kg/m ²)	Expected Weight Gain
Underweight <19	28 – 40 lbs
Normal weight 19 – 24.5	25 – 35 lbs
Overweight 25 – 29.9	15 – 25 lbs
Obese >30	11 – 20 lbs

Weight gain during pregnancy: reexamining the guidelines. Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. May 2009.

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When to Call the Doctor

Any of the following signs may be a warning that you need medical care:

- Severe headache with blurred vision or spots before your eyes
- Unrelieved abdominal pains
- Marked swelling in your upper body (face or hands)
- Sudden weight gain in just a few days
- Severe stomach pains or cramps, perhaps with nausea or diarrhea
- Vomiting persisting for more than 24 hours
- Chills or fever of more than 100 degrees
- Any slight bleeding from the nipples, rectum, bladder or vagina (some vaginal bleeding is normal after a pelvic examination)
- Sudden or slow fluid release from the vagina
- Regular contractions, becoming stronger as time progresses
- No fetal movement for 24 hours after 28 weeks
- Bloody coughing
- Painful or burning urination
- Double vision

Important Phone Numbers

The Ochsner staff is available 24 hours a day to take care of you. Don't hesitate to call your doctor's office if you experience any of the symptoms listed below. On weekends, holidays and after-hours, you may call the hospital where you have decided to deliver.

OB/GYN Department	504-842-4155
Labor and Delivery	504-842-3595
Childbirth Education	504-842-4155
Lactation Program	504-842-5210

Ochsner Medical Center, 1514 Jefferson Highway, New Orleans, LA 70121

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