

NEWS

Your changing body



■ **Question:** What kinds of physical demands can I expect in pregnancy?

■ **Answer:** Pregnancy affects you physically from head-to-toe, but knowing what to expect can make the changes less daunting.



Congratulations! You're pregnant. Now brace yourself for the many ways your body will evolve. "Pregnancy is a different state of being, and your entire body changes," says Owen Montgomery, MD, chair of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at Drexel University in Philadelphia. Here's what you can expect:

First Trimester

Extreme fatigue, nausea, and vomiting are common now. Often a woman becomes sensitive to certain smells, which can dampen her appetite. As your baby grows, you may notice more pressure on your bladder and more visits to the bathroom. "If it's your first pregnancy, you may not notice any swelling in your abdomen just yet," Montgomery says. "But you'll show sooner with a second pregnancy," he adds.

Second Trimester

Around now, morning sickness eases up, and you'll start to feel more energetic. The surge in energy is due to an increase in blood flow, Montgomery says. During this trimester, you may start feeling some lower abdominal pain as your uterus stretches. Pregnancy

hormones may cause gums to swell and bleed.

As the trimester progresses, you may notice lower back pain. The extra blood produced by increasing hormone levels may cause nosebleeds and congestion. You may also notice that you're more forgetful. Some women experience heartburn as hormones relax the valve between your stomach and esophagus, allowing stomach acid to leak back into the esophagus.

Third Trimester

As your baby continues to grow, you'll notice significantly more discomfort. Lower back pain may worsen, and you're likely to experience constipation from the high levels of progesterone that are slowing digestion. You may also develop hemorrhoids, painful itchy varicose veins in the rectal area caused by extra blood flow in the pelvic area. Many women experience varicose veins, swollen feet, leg cramps, and shortness of breath.

And expect to be considerably more tired. "The energy you felt in the second trimester begins to be offset by the fact you really are bigger," Montgomery says. By the time you near the end of this trimester, you'll most likely have trouble sleeping and difficulty concentrating.

In spite of the discomforts,

Montgomery says there is reason to celebrate. "You've reached the home stretch. Many women get excited about their approaching due date," he says.

FACTS

Get moving....

For many pregnant women, exercise is the last thing they want to do. Exercise actually can boost your energy levels. Being active and exercising at least 30 minutes most days of the week can benefit your pregnancy in many ways:

- Reduces backaches, constipation, bloating, and swelling
- Boosts your mood
- Promotes muscle tone, strength, and endurance
- Helps you sleep better

Exercising now also will make it easier for you to get back in shape after the baby is born. Talk with your health care provider to make sure you do not have any health conditions that may limit your activity.

You should do moderate exercise for 30 minutes or more on most days, if not every day. If you have not been active, start with a few minutes each day and build up to 30 minutes or more.

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QUESTIONNAIRE



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■ **Question:** What are the current recommendations for dental care during pregnancy?

■ **Answer:** Pregnant women may avoid seeking dental care because of fears harming their baby, but the importance of maintaining oral hygiene in pregnancy can not be overstated. Pregnant women are at an increased risk for cavities and gum disease due to acid reflux in combination with bacteria and reduced immune response.

It's safe to have dental work during pregnancy so don't cancel your regular dental visit just because you are pregnant. A dental checkup early in pregnancy helps make sure that your mouth stays healthy. Pregnant women should inform the dentist that they are pregnant before receiving X-rays and avoid lying for long periods of time in the reclining position.



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