

# How to Cope with Pain or Discomfort During Pregnancy

## Third Trimester of Pregnancy

You can expect many changes to your body during the third trimester of pregnancy. These changes may also increase your pain or discomfort.

Here are some common discomforts and how to cope with them.

### Indigestion (Gas)

To help to prevent the queasy and gassy feeling of indigestion, try these suggestions:

- Avoid foods that produce gas.
- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Get regular exercise.
- Take a medicine to help reduce gas. (Talk with your health care provider before starting any new medicine.)

### Constipation

To help avoid constipation:

- Drink 8 to 10 glasses of liquids each day.
- Drink hot or warm liquids first thing in the morning.
- Eat high-fiber cereals, fruits and vegetables.
- Walk or increase your daily activity.

Talk with your health care provider before taking a laxative/stool softener.

### When to Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you have:

- increased pain
- stomach cramping
- any vaginal discharge
- leg pain, sudden swelling or asymmetric swelling (when one side of your body is affected more than the other side)
- any problems you know or think are related to your pregnancy.

### Round Ligament Pain

A round ligament anchors your uterus on the right and left side of your abdomen. If you move suddenly, especially when getting up or raising your arms, you can feel a sharp tug. Overstretching these ligaments causes this pain. Moving slowly can help prevent most of this overstretching. A maternity support garment or belt may be helpful as well.

### Lower Back and Hip Pain

Your growing baby will put more stress on your back and also affect your posture. This could cause pain in your lower back.

Hormone changes will cause your connective tissues to loosen. This will make it easier for your baby to fit through the birth canal, but could also cause hip pain.

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To help ease lower back and hip pain:

- Use a maternity support garment or belt to help relieve some of the pressure from your hips and back.
- Sleep with a pillow between your legs.
- Use good posture.
- Soak in a warm bath, ask your partner for a gentle massage or use a cold pack.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) to help relieve pain. (Talk with your health care provider before starting any new medicine.)

## Sciatica

The sciatic nerve is a long nerve that goes from your lower back down to your feet. As your baby grows, there may be more pressure on this nerve which can cause pain. Stretching and taking warm baths may help relieve some of this discomfort.

## Vaginal Pressure and Pain

Vaginal pain and pressure is common as your baby grows. The increased blood flow to your vagina and pelvic area can make the area feel full and swollen. At the end of your pregnancy, your body will release a hormone called "relaxin." It will help relax your ligaments in your pelvis to help you deliver your baby.

To relieve some of this discomfort:

- Do Kegel exercises to improve circulation.
- Soak in a warm bath.
- Wrap an ice pack in a towel and sit on it for 20 minutes.
- Elevate (raise) your feet.
- Wear cotton underwear.

## Trouble Sleeping

Achy joints and muscles plus a large belly can make it hard to get comfortable in bed.

Restless leg syndrome (RLS) and leg cramps may also start or get worse. These can make it hard to sleep to fall asleep. In most cases, the cause of RLS is unknown. There are some things that go along with RLS including pregnancy, low iron or anemia, and eating or drinking too much caffeine.

Circulation changes can cause leg cramps. They may also be caused by too much phosphorus or too little calcium in your body.

To help you sleep better, try these suggestions:

- Arrange pillows under your legs, belly and shoulders. Add a pillow between your knees. Use a long body pillow to help keep you in a side-lying position. Limit the amount of caffeine you have each day.
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- Do foot pumps and stretches before going to sleep. Avoid pointing your toes when stretching your legs in bed.
- Practice your relaxation technique or do slow, relaxing breathing after you are in bed.
- Go to bed only when you are tired. If you can't fall asleep right away, leave the room and find something quiet to do such as reading, meditating or listening to music. When you are tired, go back to bed.
- Make your bed softer by putting an egg crate mattress or sleeping bag under your bottom sheet.
- Soak in a warm bath before bed. Ask your partner for a gentle massage or foot rub.
- If you wake up during the night, try resting in a recliner.

Talk with your health care provider before taking a sleep aid.

## Edema

Edema is swelling that happens when extra fluid builds up in the tissues of your body. It can affect any part of your body, but it is most common in your feet, legs and hands.

The size and weight of your uterus and baby makes it hard to pump the blood out of your feet. That leads to swelling that increases during the day but goes away when you lie down at night.

To reduce swelling:

- Elevate (raise) your feet. When you have your feet up, do ankle circles and foot pumps.
- Lie on your side or reclined.
- Drink plenty of water and avoid having too much salt.
- Soak in a warm bath.
- Eat fruits and vegetables that are high in water content (such as cucumbers, cantaloupe, watermelon and strawberries).

Tell your health care provider if you have any leg pain, sudden swelling or asymmetric swelling (when one side of your body is affected more than the other side).