



KNOWLEDGE TO EQUIP PEERS FOR EACH PREGNANCY STAGE

Module 3.2: Pregnancy

Common Pregnancy Symptoms and When to Call a Provider

The following are common symptoms experienced during pregnancy, recommendations for support, and when to call a health provider. This information applies to anyone who is pregnant, not just people who use drugs.

First Trimester (Weeks 1–13)

What's Happening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rapid hormonal shifts, increased blood volume, and the early formation of the placenta can cause changes in energy levels and mood.
Common Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extreme fatigue• Tender, swollen breasts• Nausea and vomiting (often called “morning sickness,” which can happen at any time of day)• Increased urination• Mood swings• Constipation• Headaches• Food cravings or aversions
Support Strategies^{1,2}	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage small, frequent meals to manage nausea. Bland foods like crackers, toast, and ginger or peppermint tea (or candy) may help. Avoid greasy, high-fat, and spicy foods, as they can be irritating and more difficult to digest. Some people find it helpful to drink cold, carbonated beverages and to drink liquids separate from meals (waiting about 20 to 30 minutes in between). Others find relief by wearing motion sickness wristbands.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rest and hydration are important. Encourage participants to drink plenty of water and rest when they can.• Emotional support is key—mood swings are normal, but nonjudgmental listening can make a big difference.
When to Call a Provider¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If nausea and vomiting are so severe that a participant is not able to eat or drink anything, even water, they may have a condition called <i>hyperemesis gravidarum</i>. This can be dangerous because it can cause severe dehydration and nutrient loss.³• Light bleeding or spotting during the first trimester is normal. If bleeding is enough to soak a pad or comes with intense cramping or abdominal pain, call a doctor.• If a headache is worse than normal or happens with changes in vision or blood pressure, this needs quick medical attention.

Second Trimester (Weeks 14–27)

What's Happening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The baby is growing, visible body changes are happening, and symptoms from the first trimester may lessen.
Common Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Body aches (back, abdomen, groin, or thighs)• Stretch marks• Skin changes, such as dark patches on the face (melasma)• Numbness or tingling in hands (carpal tunnel syndrome)• Increased appetite• Swelling in ankles and fingers• Constipation• Feeling the baby move for the first time
Support Strategies^{1,2}	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage gentle movement, stretching, and hydration to ease body aches and swelling.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aim for drinking about 8 cups of water a day—try flavored water or foods with high water content, such as grapes, watermelon, or cucumbers.• Some women find an exercise called the pelvic rock helps with back pain. Watch an example video from the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center.⁴• Moving slowly when getting up from a sitting or lying position can ease muscle aches and prevent dizziness.• Discuss the importance of a balanced diet, rich in protein, fiber, and iron. Eating foods with a lot of fiber (like bananas, oranges, apples, mangoes, kale, spinach, beans, legumes, and whole-grain bread) can help with constipation. Prunes (fruit or juice) and figs are natural laxatives.• Suggest supportive measures like a belly band, sleeping with extra pillows for comfort, and elevating legs and feet when they are sore or swelling.
When to Call a Provider¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Severe swelling or sudden weight gain, high blood pressure, or severe headaches that may include blurred vision or light sensitivity, which could indicate <i>preeclampsia</i>.⁵ This is a serious condition that needs to be monitored carefully.• Persistent or worsening numbness/tingling in hands.• Intense abdominal pain or contractions before 37 weeks.

Third Trimester (Weeks 28–40)

What's Happening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The baby grows rapidly, and the body prepares for labor.
Common Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shortness of breath• Heartburn• Increased urination• Swelling of hands and feet• Trouble sleeping



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hemorrhoids• Braxton Hicks contractions (practice contractions)• Leaking breasts
Support Strategies^{1,2}	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage sleeping on the left side and using extra pillows for comfort. Avoid lying down flat after eating.• Recommend smaller meals to reduce heartburn.• Suggest gentle movement, hydration, and fiber-rich foods to prevent constipation and hemorrhoids.
When to Call a Provider¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less fetal movement: If fewer than 10 movements are felt in two hours after 28 weeks, this could indicate distress.⁶• Signs of pre-term labor: Regular contractions, pelvic pressure, back pain, or fluid leakage before 37 weeks.• Severe swelling, high blood pressure, persistent headaches, or visual disturbances—possible signs of preeclampsia.

References

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