

INFORMATION SHEET

Nausea and vomiting during pregnancy

expert care for women

What causes nausea and vomiting during pregnancy?

It is not known why more than 50 percent of women experience nausea and vomiting during the first 16 weeks of pregnancy. Nausea may be related to low blood sugar levels, low levels of vitamin B6, a hormonal imbalance, or an imbalance in potassium and magnesium. However, a well balanced diet should provide all of these vitamins and minerals.

Generally the nausea occurs during the morning; hence it is also called morning sickness. Unfortunately some women will still experience nausea during the afternoon or evening.

Severe vomiting in pregnancy is very rare. It only occurs in about one in 1000 pregnancies and is called hyperemesis gravidarum.

How can I reduce nausea and vomiting?

Some practical ways to reduce nausea and vomiting during pregnancy include:

- not over-eating;
- eating smaller meals, more often, such as every two or three hours;
- having a snack of yoghurt, milk, juice bread or a sandwich before bed, can help reduce nausea in the morning. You may need to sit upright for 10 to 20 minutes after eating to prevent gastric reflux;
- getting out of bed slowly to avoid sudden movement;
- drinking soups and other liquids between meals. Instead of drinking fluids with meals, drink them about half an hour after the meal. This may help reduce the distension and swelling of the stomach that can trigger vomiting;
- avoid greasy or fried food, they are hard to digest and can worsen nausea, and
- getting plenty of fresh air. Take a short walk or try sleeping with the window slightly open. To help get rid of odours, open the windows and use the exhaust fan when you are cooking.

Can taking ginger reduce nausea and vomiting?

Research has shown that half a capsule of Zinax, which is used for arthritis, taken four times a day, can reduce nausea. Each capsule contained 1.5 grams of dried ginger. Other studies have shown that one gram of dried ginger can reduce nausea.

What else can be taken to reduce nausea and vomiting?

Your doctor can advise of medications which may help reduce nausea and vomiting.

I am unable to eat much due to nausea, if I am not reaching my dietary requirements could this harm my baby?

If you had a good diet before pregnancy, your body will generally have enough stores of vitamins and minerals for the healthy growth and development of your baby. The nausea is generally confined to the beginning of the pregnancy and once alleviated you will be able to resume a well balanced diet.