

Morning Sickness

by Jill Kelsey

Morning sickness is one of the most common pregnancy complaints. Often, morning sickness occurs in the morning hours of the first four to six weeks of pregnancy; however, it can occur at any time of day, and in some women, it may last longer or occur throughout the entire pregnancy. Morning sickness symptoms vary from woman to woman. They may include any combination of nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, the development of psychological symptoms like depression or anxiety, and, in rare cases, a condition called hyperemesis gravidarum. Hyperemesis gravidarum can occur due to the effects of dehydration and weight loss as a result of vomiting; this condition requires medical attention. Generally, though, morning sickness disappears after 12-20 weeks gestation. (1) Generally, morning sickness is a sign that you produce enough hormones to support a healthy pregnancy.

While some instances of morning sickness may be a result of hormonal changes, additional risk factors for developing the complaint may include gestation of multiples, being pregnant with a girl, the influence of preexisting medical conditions, and a family or personal history of morning sickness. (1)

Warning Signs to Watch Out For With Morning Sickness

If you are concerned with the severity of your morning sickness, bring it up with your GP/OB. **If you experience any of the following warning signs, contact your healthcare provider right away:**

- You are no longer urinating, or it is infrequent and dark in color
- You have an elevated heart rate
- You are experiencing dizziness
- You are unable to keep liquids down

Triggers

It is helpful to identify the triggers that result in morning sickness. Certain smells, like perfumes or pungent foods, can trigger nausea. Additionally, waiting too long between meals can be a contributing factor. Try to keep track of the triggers and plan ahead to avoid or minimize them. Taking into consideration when you feel the symptoms can help you to identify the triggers.

Give Me Some Relief!

The big question now lies in how to get some relief from these symptoms. The following items are known to help provide relief from morning sickness in different women. See what works for you, but consult your OB if you have questions, a medical condition, or develop any warning signs. **Potential relief may include:**

- Consumption of small, frequent, and easy-to-digest meals and snacks that are high in protein and low in fat
- Ginger in various forms like soda, hard candy, or tea
- Mint tea
- Switching your prenatal vitamin
- Stay hydrated and make sure you consume enough electrolytes
- Salty snacks
- A dry snack first thing upon waking (e.g., a soda cracker or dry toast)
- Vitamin B6 or B6-containing foods (e.g., nuts, seeds, lean meats and poultry, lentils, whole grains, beef liver, potatoes, chickpeas)
- Acupuncture
- Acupressure
- Over-the-counter nausea medication

Make sure to eat frequently enough, but not too much at once. On average, a woman only needs about 500 extra daily calories to support a pregnancy. That number increases when pregnant with multiples.

Snack Ideas

In general, seek easy-to-digest, high-protein foods that are lower in fat. A great example of this type of food is wild Alaskan Salmon, steamed vegetables, warming broths or stews, eggs, and sauteed dark leafy greens. **Additional snack ideas may include:**

- Salted cashews
- Avocado with savory herbs
- Crackers or pretzels
- Raisins
- Greek yogurt with cashews or chopped fruit
- Hummus dip with veggies
- Banana or apple sauce
- Tuna and crackers (SafeCatch offers pregnancy-safe tuna)
- Watermelon

A Note On Supplements

Some supplements are capable of causing digestive discomfort. Be sure to mention which supplements you are taking with your medical provider, especially when you are experience nausea after consuming them. There may be an alternative time of day to take them, a different brand to try, or a different way to consume the supplement that can make all of the difference in reducing your morning sickness symptoms. A single brand of prenatal vitamins will agree with one woman and may not agree with another. Consider your prenatal vitamins carefully. We suggest opting for a prenatal that includes a form of methylated folate (l-methylfolate) versus the manufactured form known as folic acid. These brands may be slightly more expensive but contain a more bioavailable form of folate. There are different forms, and depending on your genetics, your body may do better with one form over another. (3)

Folate is essential in pregnancy to prevent neural tube defects in the fetus.

Some individuals (up to 40% of people) have an MTHFR genetic mutation. The MTHFR gene is responsible for encoding the enzyme methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase (MTHFR), which breaks down dietary folate and folic acid into bioavailable forms. A mutation in this gene impacts the breakdown of natural dietary folates and manufactured folic acid, resulting in the disruption of several body functions, including digestion, DNA production, hormone metabolism, neurotransmitter function, and brain health, among others. If you do have an MTHFR genetic mutation, you may have already observed a history of mood disorders, thyroid problems, autoimmune disorders, or other symptoms. (4)

Nutritional Depletion & Lifestyle

Certain nutrients are needed when pregnant. If the fetus is not receiving the nutrients via the mother's dietary intake, the nutrients are taken from the mother's nutrient stores (assuming she has them). This is a dangerous assumption, however. There are several factors that can deplete a woman of certain nutrients like folate and B6, among others. (5) Some factors that contribute to nutrient depletion include:

- A history of eating disorders or malnutrition
- Restrictive diets
- Long-term use of oral contraceptives (B6, B12, folate)(6)
- High caffeine or alcohol consumption
- Certain medical conditions like hemolytic anemia or exfoliative dermatological conditions
- Use of certain medications (e.g., methotrexate, aminopterin, trimethoprim) (folate)(7)

Key Take Aways

It may be helpful to keep a journal to help keep track of nausea triggers and dietary intake. Doing so can help you to realize lifestyle patterns, nausea triggers, and help you to modify your lifestyle accordingly. The primary concern is that both mom and baby are able to absorb the vital nutrients needed for health. Sometimes, there is a genetic reason for malabsorption and morning sickness, but in many cases, lifestyle modifications can resolve any issues with morning sickness. That being said, some women are more predisposed to morning sickness than others, and for those who experience it at a detrimental level, there are methods of providing relief if you make it known to your medical care provider.

Good luck, Mama! Let us know what you've found to be the most helpful in resolving your morning sickness.

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