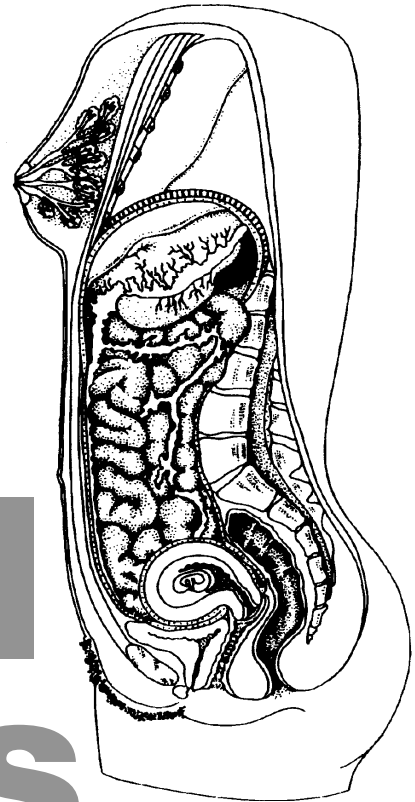


# Physical Changes



The female body has a remarkable ability to make room for the growing baby. It is hard to imagine how the space is found. Even more amazing is how the body opens to allow the birth of an infant.

Several physical changes take place during pregnancy and labour to make it all possible. These changes, although wonderful and necessary, can result in some discomforts for mother. Understanding why they happen and learning a few comfort techniques, can help.

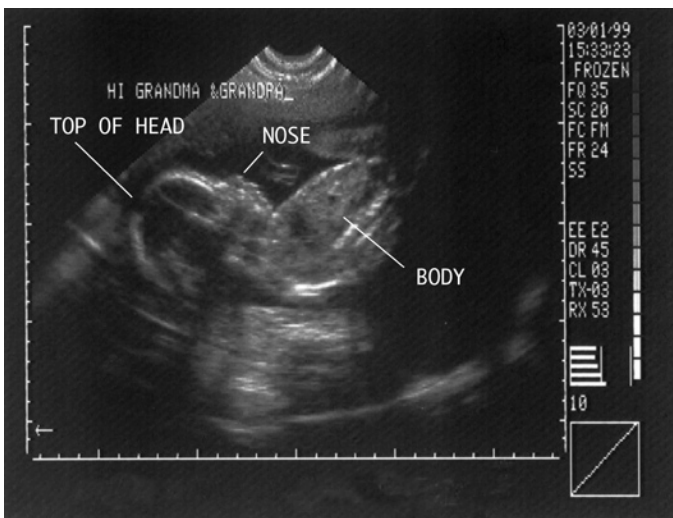
## The First Trimester

(First day of last menstrual period to the end of the 14th week).

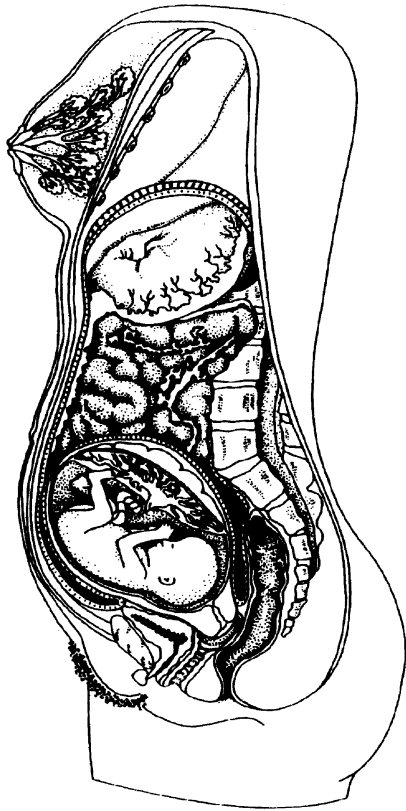
Hormonal changes slow down the digestive system to allow more nutrients to be absorbed. This may cause morning sickness. Changes in hormone levels also cause fatigue and increased vaginal secretions.

As the uterus grows it compresses the bladder causing urinary frequency. The breasts become fuller, nipples may tingle, and the areola (area around the nipple) begins to darken.

The average weight gain during the first trimester is 2-7 pounds.



*Ultrasound at 21 Weeks*



## The Second Trimester

(15th-27th week)

The uterus rises out of the pelvic cavity and the pregnancy begins to show. Fetal movements may be felt as early as 16 weeks.

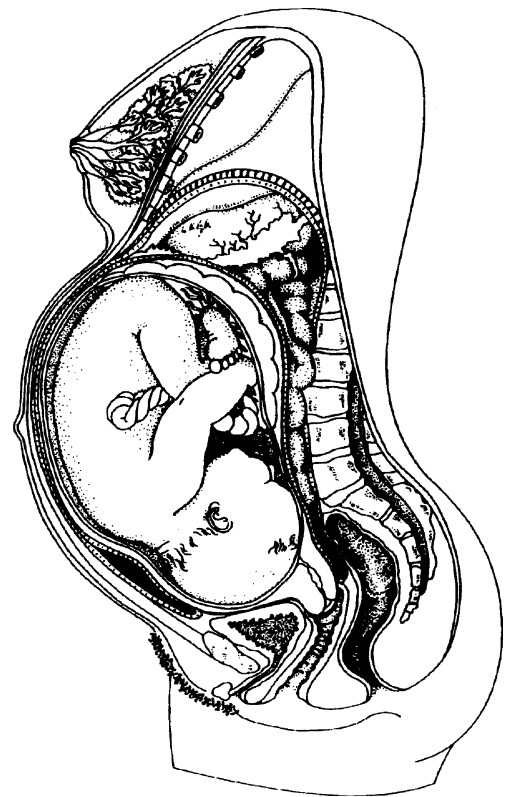
Nausea is usually gone, and food cravings may occur. Two skin changes may also be noticed; a dark line called the linea nigra may develop between the pubic bone and the top of the uterus and darkened splotches on the face may also occur (the mask of pregnancy).

Changes in blood volume may cause nasal congestion and nose bleeds. Feelings of faintness and dizziness may also occur following rapid changes in position.

Metabolism increases, and may cause an increase in perspiration or a heat intolerance.

Pelvic joints begin to relax in preparation for labour. Leg cramps are also common as the uterus presses on nerves and blood vessels.

Weight gain during the second trimester averages approximately one pound per week.



## The Third Trimester

(28th week to delivery)

In the latter stages of pregnancy, the growing uterus prevents the lungs from fully expanding. This may cause shortness of breath.

The increasing pressure of the uterus on the blood vessels may cause swollen ankles and varicose veins. Anemia may also occur as the blood volume expands rapidly.

The digestive system slows down once again causing heartburn and constipation. Hemorrhoids may also develop as a result of straining to pass stool.

The growing uterus shifts the center of gravity, and muscles and ligaments relax in preparation for labour. This may cause backache.

During the last few weeks before birth, the baby drops into the pelvis - this is called lightening. The uterus once again compresses the bladder causing urinary frequency.

The average total weight gain by the end of a pregnancy is 25-35 pounds.

# Personal

Every mother experiences some discomfort during pregnancy. Most symptoms go away quickly or can be easily relieved. If any of these problems persist, or cannot be relieved easily, talk to your health care provider.

Fathers who understand the physical changes of pregnancy and the common discomforts are more able to help minimize them.

## MORNING SICKNESS

Half of pregnant women experience nausea and vomiting during the 4th - 14th week.

**Possible Causes** • Hormone changes • Low blood sugar • Tension, worry and fatigue can make it worse

**Relief** • Give yourself extra time in the morning. Eat dry toast or crackers and then rest before getting out of bed • Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day and aim for healthy foods high in protein or carbohydrates • Keep your kitchen well ventilated and cut down on cooking time • Eat a high protein snack at bedtime to relieve morning sickness due to low blood sugar • Avoid rich, spicy, acidic or fried foods and eat less fat in general • Though it's important to keep yourself well hydrated, try to drink fluids only between meals, and limit them during meals • Sniff lemons. The smell of a cut lemon may help your nausea • Try acupressure bands on your wrist. Drugstores sell a soft cotton wristband called Sea-Band. Sea-bands were created to fight seasickness, and have helped many pregnant women through morning sickness • Talk to your doctor/midwife before taking any drugs

## CONSTIPATION

**Possible Causes** • Decreased physical activity • Relaxation of bowel caused by hormones

**Relief** • Drink 8-12 large glasses of fluid daily • Eat high fibre foods - raw fruits and vegetables, whole grain bread and cereals, prunes • Add 1 - 2 tbsp. of wheat bran to your breakfast cereal • Exercise regularly • Discuss laxatives with your doctor/midwife before using

## HEMORRHOIDS

**Possible Causes** • Pressure of uterus • Lack of exercise • Constipation, straining • Not emptying the bowel when needed

**Relief** • Drink 8-12 large glasses of fluid daily • Eat high fibre foods • Add 1-2 tbsp. of wheat bran to cereal • Exercise regularly (including Kegels) • Use cold compresses or ice

## INTESTINAL GAS

**Possible Causes** • Decreased activity of the intestines caused by enlarging uterus and hormones

**Relief** • Chew your food well • Have only small servings of foods that cause gas eg. corn, beans, cabbage, lentils

## VARICOSE VEINS

**Possible Causes** • May be inherited • Pressure of uterus on veins in abdomen • Hormones relax walls of veins

**Relief** • Avoid wearing clothing or stockings that are too tight on your body or legs • Wear support stockings • Walk to improve circulation • Elevate feet when sitting or lying down • Avoid sitting with legs crossed

## HEARTBURN

**Possible Causes** • Enlarged uterus pushes stomach upwards • Hormones relax muscles at opening allowing digestive juices to go back up esophagus

**Relief** • Eat small meals frequently during the day • Avoid spicy and fatty foods • Avoid coffee, tea, and alcoholic drinks • Take fluids (soup, juice, milk) 1/2 hour after solid meals, not at the same time • Avoid lying down right after meals • Use pillows to raise your chest and head when you sleep • Talk to your doctor/midwife or pharmacist about antacids before using

## TINGLING OR NUMBNESS OF FINGERS

**Possible Causes** • Breast tissue high in the armpit enlarges and puts pressure on the nerves • Stooped shoulders

**Relief** • Place hands on shoulders and make circles with your elbows • Practice good posture. • Wear a supportive bra

## SWELLING OF FEET

**Possible Causes** • Enlarging uterus presses on the veins, slowing blood return from the legs

# Comfort

**Relief** • Avoid sitting or standing for long periods  
• Elevate legs whenever possible • Lie on your left side to help the kidneys get rid of the extra fluid • Put on support stockings before getting up • Avoid constrictive clothing (e.g. knee highs)

## **DIZZINESS AND FAINTING**

**Possible Causes** • Pressure of the uterus on large blood vessels in the abdomen • Anemia - low blood iron  
• Decreased blood sugar

**Relief** • Get up slowly from sitting or lying down  
• Avoid standing still for long periods of time • Eat healthy meals and snacks regularly throughout the day • Avoid rooms with poor ventilation • See doctor or midwife

## **UPPER BACKACHE**

**Possible Causes** • Enlarging uterus • Increase in breast tissue

**Relief** • Sit and stand tall - good posture • Wear supportive shoes with low heels • Practice progressive relaxation daily • Wear a supportive bra • Practice shoulder circles daily

## **LOWER BACKACHE**

**Possible Causes** • Enlarging uterus • Softening of ligaments • Poor posture

**Relief** • Practice progressive relaxation daily • Use a firm mattress on your bed • Lift and carry objects correctly • Massage • Good posture

## **CRAMPS IN LEGS OR FEET**

**Possible Causes** • Uterus presses on blood vessels and abdominal nerves • Fatigue or chilling • Sudden stretching • Calcium-phosphorous imbalance

**Relief** • Avoid massaging a cramp • To relieve foot cramps: - press foot against a firm surface - straighten leg, keep knee stiff and use foot muscles to push heel out and pull toes toward the body • Do warm-ups before exercising • Avoid getting overtired • Elevate your feet • Discuss diet with a doctor/midwife

## **GROIN SPASM - PAIN AT TOP OF LEG**

**Possible Causes** • Leg ligament cramps • May be caused by standing too long, sudden movement, coughing or sneezing

**Relief** • Avoid sudden movements • Bend slightly at the hips when coughing or sneezing • To get rid of the spasm: - pull your leg up as if you were going to tie your shoe - lightly massage in groin - rest in a side-lying position with your knees bent

## **PAIN (“STITCH”) UNDER RIBS**

**Possible Causes** • Enlarging uterus presses on diaphragm • Diaphragm presses against the bottom of the lungs

**Relief** • Stretch arms overhead, then bend side to side slowly • Relax - breathe deeply

## **ENLARGED BREASTS**

**Causes** • Changes occur in breast tissue to prepare for breastfeeding. Milk glands enlarge, fat and supporting tissue increase

**Relief** • Select a cotton bra that has large openings and wide straps. Take along nursing pads when being fitted  
• Wear a bra at night for additional support • Wash breasts with plain water only. Soap and perfumes dry the skin

## **SHORTNESS OF BREATH**

**Possible Causes** • Decreased lung capacity because of pressure of uterus against diaphragm

**Relief** • Elevate the head of your bed or prop yourself up with pillows • Raise arms overhead, lifting up the rib cage • Relax periodically and take slow deep breaths  
• Avoid overloading your stomach • Pace activities - slow down

## **MOOD SWINGS, MIXED FEELINGS**

**Possible Causes** • Hormonal and metabolic changes  
• Feelings about timing of the pregnancy, sexuality and changes in lifestyle • Fear of parenting • Pressure from others • Concern for baby's health

**Relief** • Reassurance and support from family/friends  
• Good communication with partner, family and friends  
• Discuss concerns with physician/midwife or nurse

**PLEASE NOTE:** These feelings may continue after birth. If severe, it may be a sign of Postpartum Depression. Treatment is available. Consult your physician or midwife.

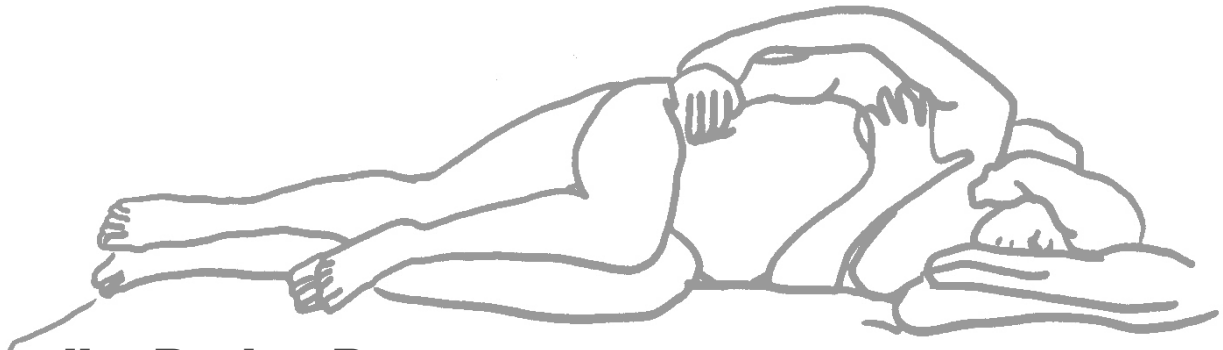
# Relief Quiz

Test your knowledge by filling in the blanks. You have just read the information you need to complete this exercise.

1. To relieve discomfort caused by breast enlargement, a woman should wear a supportive \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Nausea during pregnancy is often called \_\_\_\_\_ sickness.
3. Leg cramps are caused when the \_\_\_\_\_ presses down on the blood vessels.
4. Good \_\_\_\_\_ can help to relieve backache.
5. Tingling in fingers can be caused by \_\_\_\_\_.
6. To relieve heartburn, a woman should try sleeping with extra \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Hemorrhoids are often caused by \_\_\_\_\_ to have a bowel movement.
8. To prevent abdominal gas, a woman should \_\_\_\_\_ her food well.
9. A woman should drink extra \_\_\_\_\_ to prevent constipation.
10. A woman should try to relax if she has a \_\_\_\_\_ under the ribs.
11. During pregnancy, getting up slowly from sitting or lying down can help to avoid \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Answers: 1.bra 2.morning 3 uterus 4.posture  
5.stooped shoulders 6.pillows 7.straining 8.chew  
9.fluids 10.stitch 11.dizziness:fainting

# Sexuality



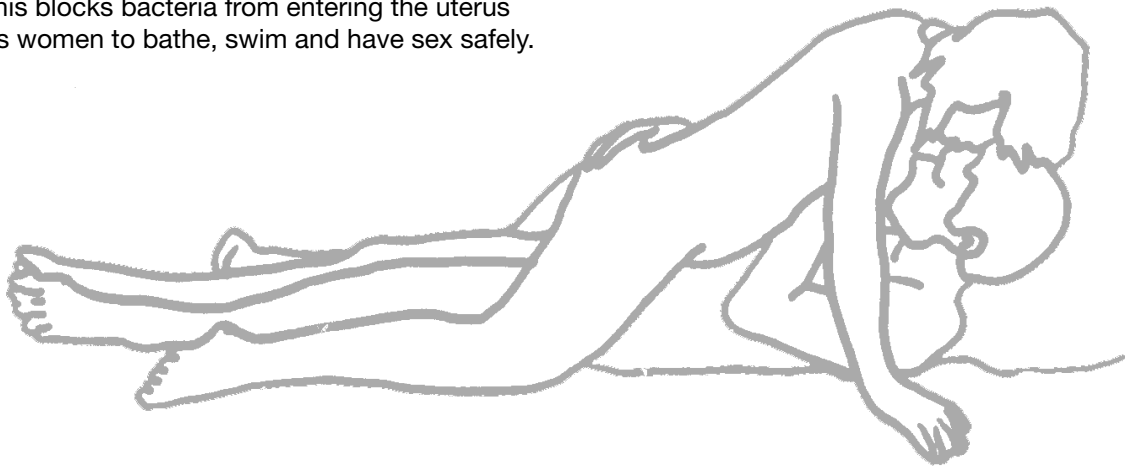
## Sexuality During Pregnancy

Pregnancy is viewed by many couples as a time of change. Physical, emotional and anticipated role changes all influence how a person feels about his or her own sexuality, making each couple's experience very unique. Some say their sexual response or desire during pregnancy is enhanced, while others find it a challenge to maintain sexual relations. The information listed below may answer some questions that you and your partner might have.

In general, sexual intercourse may occur safely at any time during pregnancy. The penis cannot reach the baby. The uterus, a protective muscular organ, encloses the developing baby completely. Early in pregnancy a mucous plug also forms at the cervix or entrance to the womb. This blocks bacteria from entering the uterus and allows women to bathe, swim and have sex safely.

During the middle three months a woman may begin to "feel more like herself". With vaginal lubrication naturally increasing at this time, a woman's sexual feelings and desire for sex may increase.

As the pregnancy progresses into the last three months, couples may experience discomfort with their usual sexual positions. Women may find that the position of her partner on top (missionary position) causes discomfort due to the weight of the man on her abdomen. The missionary position may cause a woman's blood pressure to drop as the weight of the uterus compresses blood vessels preventing blood from getting back to her heart.



Sexual intercourse, masturbation and orgasm without intercourse, should not take place if it causes vaginal pain, abdominal pain, or any kind of bleeding or cramping. It is advisable to report any of these symptoms to your doctor/midwife.

Due to physical and emotional changes, it is important to maintain good communication with your partner throughout pregnancy. You and your partner may explore ways of physical pleasure through touch and closeness if intercourse is uncomfortable.

In the first three months, discomforts like fatigue, nausea, vomiting and breast tenderness may make sex less desirable. Breast stimulation may need to be postponed during sexual activity if uncomfortable.

Adapting lovemaking positions - sidelying or vaginal entry from behind is often preferable near the end of pregnancy.

The last weeks of pregnancy may also have added discomforts such as shortness of breath, fatigue, increased size and downward pressure as the baby settles into the pelvis.

Share with each other your feelings and discover together mutual ways of pleasure and gratification during this special time. Contact the Sexual Health Program at the Grey Bruce Health Unit for further information and resources.