

Pregnancy - Morning Sickness

Morning sickness is the acute, transient nausea associated with pregnancy. 'Morning sickness' is a misnomer – it may occur at any time of the day, though it most commonly occurs soon after waking. It is thought to be caused by increased levels of oestrogen being produced by the placenta and/or by increased levels of human chorionic gonadotropin. Morning sickness usually starts in the first month of the pregnancy, peaking in the 6th week, and continuing until the 16th week. For 50% of all sufferers, it ends by the 16th week of pregnancy. For the other half, it may take up to another month to get relief but some women will have morning sickness off and on for their entire pregnancy.

Risk factors:

Major causative factors and risk factors that can contribute to the incidence of morning sickness include

- An increase in the circulating level of the hormone oestrogen. Oestrogen levels may increase by up to a hundredfold during pregnancy.
- An increase in human chorionic gonadotropin.
- Low blood sugar during pregnancy.
- An increase in progesterone relaxes the muscles in the uterus, which prevents early childbirth, but may also relax the stomach and intestines, leading to nausea.
- Intake of alcohol, sugar, oils and meat, which have been postulated to cause a natural trigger of morning sickness in the body as a way of discouraging ingestion of less healthy foods.

Diet and Lifestyle:

- Pregnant women are making the greatest nutritional investment of their lives. Following a nutritious low glycaemic load diet with adequate protein and healthy fats, a moderate exercise and stress management lifestyle and eliminating caffeine, nicotine and alcohol are all essential to maintaining a healthy body composition for the well-being of mother and child.
- Avoid an empty stomach. Eating small regular meals helps to maintain energy levels and may prevent morning sickness.
- Don't overeat – large meals can drain energy. Instead of eating three big meals per day, try six mini-meals to spread your kilojoule intake more evenly. This will result in more constant blood sugar and insulin levels.
- Ginger, in capsules, tea, ginger ale or ginger beer can alleviate nausea.
- Fulfil food cravings (as long as they are healthy, not harmful!)
- Drink plenty of water – a dehydrated body functions less efficiently.
- Eat iron rich foods – make sure diet includes iron rich foods such as lean red meat.
- Ensure adequate, regular, and consistent amounts of sleep each night.
- Effective relaxation is essential – try techniques such as yoga or meditation.
- Maintaining a reasonable work and personal schedule is important.
- Address chronic pain and/or depression.