

What to Do About Morning Sickness

Like many pregnant women, you may feel nauseated and even vomit at times. This is called **morning sickness**, though it can happen at any time of day. Many women find it stops during weeks 12-16 of pregnancy. For some women it lasts longer, though. We hope that the tips below will help you feel better.

A few pregnant women – about 2% – have **hyperemesis**. This is severe nausea and vomiting. You may be one of the few, especially if you vomit so much that you lose weight or cannot keep anything down. The tips here may help you, too. You will probably need extra help from your health care team, though, to make sure you get enough calories and fluids to keep you and your baby healthy.

What can I do about morning sickness?

Morning sickness is different for every woman. Old standbys like crackers, bland foods, and flat ginger ale make some women feel better, but don't help others. You need to find out what works – and doesn't work – for you. It may change over time or at different hours of the day.

Experiment with these tips. Keep track of what triggers your morning sickness, too – the time of day, smells, foods, motion, noise, lights, being tired, or anything else. Knowing the problems may help you find solutions.

Take special care of yourself when you have morning sickness. That may mean getting up more slowly in the morning, taking time off from work or short breaks when you need them, eating differently than usual, and asking others to help you avoid triggers. Try to do whatever helps you.

What should I eat and drink?

You may find it hard to stick to a healthy diet right now. That's okay. In the early months of pregnancy, getting any calories and fluid into your body is more important than trying to eat a carefully balanced diet.

- **Eat what you crave.** What textures (soft, crunchy, smooth, hard) and tastes (salty, sweet, sour, bitter, spicy, bland) appeal to you? Do you want something wet or dry? Thick or thin? Ice cold, warm, or hot? If salty foods are what you want, for example, try pretzels or potato chips. Crunch might be satisfied by celery or watermelon. Cold and sweet could be a cold orange, an ice pop, or lemonade.
- **Eat fewer fats and more carbohydrates.** Your body takes a long time to break down fatty foods (like cream cheese, butter, mayonnaise, fried food, ribs). So fats may bother you more than high-carbohydrate foods (cereals, plain pasta, bread, and rice or other grains), which break down quickly. So far, there are no studies on pregnancy and the new fat substitutes. It's safest not to eat foods that contain them right now.
- **Try keeping solids and liquids separate.** If mixing food and drink makes you feel too full and queasy, try sipping liquids between meals.
- **If you can't keep solid foods down, try liquids.** Carnation Instant Breakfast, supplements like Ensure, fruit and yogurt smoothies, and milk shakes are good choices. Blending shakes with high-protein milk (two cups powdered milk blended with one-half gallon of milk) adds more calories, too. Some women find that drinking through a straw helps.

- **Get enough fluids.** If drinking makes you feel sick, sip fluids or suck on ice chips often. Gatorade is a good choice if you don't mind the taste. Flavor plain water with a squeeze of lemon or lime. Try bottled water if the smell or taste of tap water bothers you. Snack on foods with lots of water in them, like watermelon, canned fruit, Jell-O, fruit juice bars, popsicles, and sorbet or ices.
 - **Tea may help settle your stomach.** Try sipping peppermint, spearmint, raspberry, or ginger tea during the day. (You can buy ginger tea or make it fresh by grating two tablespoons of the root into four cups hot water. Add milk, if you like.)
 - **Rest after eating.** Don't lie down, just take it easy.
-

When should I eat?

- Have small meals, snacks, or drinks every one to two hours. Carry food with you. Don't avoid eating because you feel sick. Waiting may make you feel worse since an empty stomach and low blood sugar can trigger nausea.
 - You may find you feel better at certain times of the day. Morning, afternoon, or evening might be best for you. Try to have most of your food when you feel best and eat lightly at other times.
 - Have a bedtime snack. Keep snacks by the bed for the middle of the night and the morning too. Eat before you get out of bed.
-

What about smells?

The sense of smell is much sharper during pregnancy. Strong smells can set off bouts of morning sickness.

Some culprits are:

- **Poorly aired-out rooms:** Open windows a bit to freshen the air when you can, especially while you sleep. Leave a stuffy room for a breath of fresh air when you need to.
- **Cooking:** Have someone else cook, if you can, and keep the kitchen well-ventilated. Whenever possible, make large batches and freeze meals. Eat take-out or frozen foods, or have sandwiches.

- **Smoke:** Smoke often triggers nausea. It is a health risk for you and your baby, too. Ask people not to smoke in your home or anywhere near you.
 - **Breath and body odor:** Ask people not to stand too close because you are feeling sick to your stomach. They'll move back! If the taste in your mouth or smell of your own breath bothers you, try mints or alcohol-free mouthwash.
 - **Dirty diapers:** Ask others to change diapers whenever you can.
 - **Aftershave, colognes, perfumes, hairspray:** Ask those you know well not to wear bothersome scents around you. Tell them your sense of smell is so sharp right now that even the nicest scents overwhelm you. Ask others not to stand too close, as above. Step outside for a breath of fresh air.
 - **Sweat, food smells, smoke, and perfumes often cling to clothes:** Wash clothes after wearing them once.
 - **Scented detergents, cleansers, and toiletries:** Buy unscented products. When you use cleansers, sprinkle them on a cloth or sponge instead of spraying them.
 - **Helpful smells:** Some women find natural scents like lemon, orange, lime, or pine helpful, especially to counter other smells. Try taking a few sniffs of a fruit slice or pine needles wrapped in a handkerchief.
-

What are some other triggers?

You may or may not be bothered by these triggers:

- **Bright lights:** Dim the lights, if you can. Wear sunglasses. Rest in darkened rooms.
- **Motion:** Slow down or rest for a while. If car rides bother you, avoid them, crack a window open, or walk when you can. Switch from the bus to the train or a car, or vice versa, to see if that helps. Avoid sudden bumps and jolts if you can.
- **Noise:** Turn down the volume when you can and try to avoid noise you can't control. Driving in a car may be quieter than public transportation, for example. Some women find white noise – the hum of a fan, a radio tuned between stations, or

a white noise machine – covers up more jarring noises. For others, listening to music through headphones does the trick.

- **Being tired:** Take short naps if you can at times when you're tired. Don't feel bad about going to bed early. Try to make yourself comfortable in bed so you can sleep well. A body pillow or sleeping propped up may help. If you have children at home, rest when they rest or think of games you can play with them while lying down. Take time off from work to rest up, if you can.
 - **Stress:** Try not to let stress build up. Relax for a few moments whenever you can. Meditation helps some women. Light exercise like a walk or a swim may help, too.
-

What else might help?

- Get out of bed slowly. Jumping up when you wake up (or at any time) may make you feel dizzy and sick.
- If your prenatal vitamins make you sick, try taking them at the time of day when you usually feel better. Or ask your clinician if you can just take folic acid pills for a while. (Folic acid is very important during the early weeks of pregnancy.) If taking pills is a real problem, try eating a vitamin-fortified cereal, such as Total or Product 19.
- Taking vitamin B6 lessens nausea and vomiting for some women. Ask your clinician what dose would be right for you.
- Women eat ginger in some cultures to stop morning sickness. Try drinking fresh ginger tea (see recipe on page 2). Or eat a bit of crystallized ginger or try powdered ginger in capsules (health food stores sell these items). Take 3-4 capsules in the morning with one-half cup of warm milk or water. Repeat when needed during the day. (Don't try this if the thought makes you sick!)
- Sea-Bands are stretchy bracelets with a button that presses on an acupressure point on the wrists. Some women find they help relieve nausea and motion

sickness. Your drugstore or a boating store may sell them.

- Emetrol is a nonprescription medicine for nausea that is safe to take during pregnancy. (Do not take more than the daily dose on the label.) Your clinician may suggest other medicines, too.
 - Several prescription medicines can help women who are nauseated or vomiting during pregnancy. Most doctors prefer to try other remedies first, but you may need medicine if your nausea and vomiting are severe.
-

When should I call my clinician?

Call your clinician for advice:

- If you vomit **three or more times a day**. You may need help getting enough fluid and calories to keep you and the baby healthy.
- If you vomit blood or feel abdominal (lower belly) pain.
- If your vomiting is getting worse.
- If you think you might not be gaining weight. **You should not try to lose weight during pregnancy.**

You should also talk to your clinician if the tips here are not helping. She or he may suggest other treatments, including certain medicines.

What if I have hyperemesis?

Women who have hyperemesis need extra support – emotional and physical. Some need to take days or even weeks off from work. Sometimes even people close to them can't believe that morning sickness can be so severe. If the tips here don't help you, talk to your clinician. Tell him or her what you've tried and what happened.

Some women with hyperemesis get very dehydrated. They may need to get fluid, electrolytes (special salts), vitamins, and sometimes calories by IV. (An IV delivers fluid through a needle in your arm. Usually, it is given in a clinician's office or at home.) You may be given antinausea medicine, such as Reglan, Phenergan, or Compazine, too.

More information:

- No one knows for sure what causes morning sickness. A few theories are:
 - o A sharper sense of smell due to pregnancy
 - o Slower digestion of food
 - o The effects of pregnancy hormones
 - Could eating poorly due to morning sickness harm your baby? It's not likely. Most babies grow normally, even when morning sickness is severe. Try not to feel guilty if the foods and drinks you can keep down right now don't add up to a balanced diet. Giving in to food cravings often helps women break the cycle of nausea and vomiting. When you feel better, you can add other, healthy foods.
 - Try keeping a diary for a few days. Write down why you felt sick – was it the time of day, smells, foods, motion, noise, lights, being tired – and what helped you feel better. Then try to avoid possible triggers and use what helps.
 - Some of the helpful tips here may be found in *No More Morning Sickness: A Survival Guide for Pregnant Women* by Miriam Erick, RD, MS (New York: Plume, 1993). If you're too sick to read, try her video *Morning Sickness All Day and All Night* or audio tape *Morning Sickness Miseries and Management*. You can get these by calling 617-232-1993. Ask other women what worked for them, too.
-

Remember, if you have morning sickness, you're certainly not alone.

One study of pregnant women showed:

- 80% had some symptoms of morning sickness
- 28% only felt nauseated
- 52% sometimes vomited, too
- For many, symptoms were worst in the 9th week of pregnancy. They often ended in the 12th week – even when morning sickness was severe or started very early in pregnancy
- Half the episodes of nausea and vomiting happened between 6:00 AM and 12 noon. Most of the rest were between noon and midnight. Very few took place between midnight and 6 AM.