



First Glimpse Ultrasound NI Ltd

# Early Pregnancy Symptoms

Useful information for Early Pregnancy Symptoms.

## Early Pregnancy Symptoms

All women are different and therefore may notice different signs and symptoms of early pregnancy. The most common early pregnancy symptoms are explained below; you may experience all or none of these symptoms. Generally, if you have a regular monthly cycle, missing a period is the most common first sign of pregnancy. Sometimes when the pregnancy implants there can be very light bleeding which can be mistaken for a period. If you have an irregular menstrual cycle you are less likely to know that you are pregnant so will need to look for other signs.

## Feeling Sick and Vomiting

Morning sickness is a common early pregnancy symptom; it usually starts when you are around four to six weeks pregnant. It is called morning sickness but it can happen at any time of the day or night. Many women experience a queasy feeling or nausea without sickness. If you are always sick and cannot keep any food or fluids down, you should contact your GP for further advice.

## Changes in Your Breasts

You will notice changes in your breasts from when you are about four to six weeks pregnant. Your breasts possibly will feel tender to touch, which may be similar to how they feel before a period only a little more intense. It is also common to experience a prickling or tingling sensation in the region of your nipples. You may notice that the nipples darken and stand out and your nipples may have small bumps present; often veins under the surface of your skin are more visible. These changes are due to hormones which increase the blood supply to your breasts. The tenderness tends to be most common in early pregnancy and eases as your pregnancy progresses.

## Frequent Trips to the Toilet

During the first few weeks of pregnancy, it is common to pass urine more often than usual, and this can also happen at night. Once the embryo has implanted, a hormone called Chorionic Gonadotrophin (HCG) is produced, which increases blood flow to the pelvic region and causes the bladder to become more sensitive. Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin can be detected in the urine as early as 7-9 days after fertilisation and is used as an indicator of pregnancy in most over-the-counter pregnancy tests.



It is responsible for increasing the volume of blood in the body which means that the kidneys have to work harder to excrete waste which in turn results in an increased frequency of passing urine. It is common to get urinary tract infections in early pregnancy, if you experience any burning or stinging it is advisable to see your GP for further advice.

### **Feeling Very Tired**

During the first few weeks of pregnancy it is very common to feel tired, or even exhausted. Tiredness is most common in the first and third trimesters. At times it can be overwhelming, this is due to hormonal changes taking place in your body to support your baby during the early stages of pregnancy.

### **Other common early pregnancy symptoms which may occur are:**

- Constipation
- Increased vaginal discharge
- Altered sense of taste, which many women describe as a metallic taste
- Craving new foods
- No longer like some foods or drinks that you previously enjoyed such as tea, coffee and/or fatty foods
- Losing interest in tobacco
- Increased sense of smell

If you feel you may be pregnant and have any of the above early pregnancy symptoms it is worth performing a pregnancy test. If your test is positive, it is possible to do a reassurance early pregnancy scan from 6 weeks.

## **Early Pregnancy Bleeding**

**Bleeding in early pregnancy is very common but should be investigated by having an ultrasound scan.**

### **Possible reasons for bleeding in pregnancy:**

Threatened miscarriage – A threatened miscarriage is a term used to describe a pregnancy that is developing and has a heartbeat (viable) but where some degree of bleeding has occurred or is occurring. Sometimes the bleeding occurs due to an imbalance in the hormones that are being produced during the early weeks of pregnancy. In these cases, the bleeding normally settles of its own accord at around 12-14 weeks.

Bleeding can also occur around the gestation sac after implantation. This is often picked up on scan and you will be told if this is the case. Once an ultrasound scan has demonstrated that the pregnancy is viable (has a heartbeat), even after bleeding, the risk of miscarriage is very low (approximately 3%). If the bleeding is due to hormonal imbalance there is nothing you can do. Research has proven that rest in these instances does not help.



**If you are told that there is an area of bleeding around the gestation sac then there are several things that can help to prevent the area of bleeding from worsening.**

Firstly, try and avoid any strenuous exercise. This does not mean you have to go to bed but be sensible about what you are doing.

Secondly, it is best to avoid heavy lifting. This may be difficult if you have young children at home, but try and get them to climb on to you knee rather than picking them up.

Thirdly, it is advisable to avoid sexual intercourse while you are bleeding.

It is also best to wear sanitary towels not tampons as there is an increased risk of infection if you wear tampons for bleeding in pregnancy.

If the bleeding is due to hormonal imbalance then the bleeding should settle at around 12-14 weeks when the placenta is fully functional and able to maintain the pregnancy.

If the bleeding is due to a bleed around the gestational sac then it is difficult to predict when it will settle. Sometimes the bleeding continues until all of the blood collection has disappeared. Sometimes the blood collection gets absorbed without any further bleeding.

If the bleeding worsens to more than a normal period with the passage of clots then you should contact your GP or midwife. This does not necessarily mean that the pregnancy will miscarry but you will need further follow-up to ensure that all is well.

### **Miscarriage**

Sometimes the bleeding occurs because the pregnancy has not developed as it should and it will end in miscarriage.

If the bleeding is heavy and is accompanied by the passage of clots then it may be that the miscarriage has occurred naturally. A scan will help to confirm this and will rule out any retained pregnancy tissue.

Sometimes the bleeding is only light but the pregnancy has stopped growing and no heartbeat can be detected. Again a scan will confirm if this is the case.

### **Ectopic pregnancy**

An ectopic pregnancy develops outside the womb, usually in one of the fallopian tubes. Certain things can raise your risk of having an ectopic pregnancy and these include:

Conceiving while taking the Progesterone Only Pill (the mini-pill) Conceiving with a Coil in place. Previous abdominal surgery e.g. Caesarean section or appendectomy. Pregnancy is conceived through assisted conception. Previous fertility problems. A history of pelvic infections such as Chlamydia.

An ectopic pregnancy will cause bleeding and will usually be accompanied by unilateral pain, although some do not cause any pain at all.

A scan will help to determine whether a pregnancy is misplaced.

If an ectopic pregnancy is suspected on scan you will be informed of the findings and asked to attend your local hospital for further assessment.



# Early Pregnancy Pain

**Pain can commonly occur during the early weeks of pregnancy and is often mild and crampy.**

## **Pain in Early Pregnancy**

Pain can commonly occur during the early weeks of pregnancy and is often mild and crampy. This is usually caused by the production of pregnancy hormones that can cause constipation or trapped wind, giving you a feeling of bloated.

If you have pain in early pregnancy it is advisable to have an ultrasound scan to exclude an ectopic pregnancy or an ovarian cyst, particularly if the pregnancy has been conceived through assisted conception methods.

If the pain is localised to one side and accompanied by a feeling of breathlessness, dizziness or pain in the shoulder tip, urgent medical advice should be sought.

Sometimes the pain in early pregnancy can be caused by a urinary tract infection. If this is the case then it is usually accompanied by the feeling of needing to urinate urgently and more often or stinging and pain when passing urine. If any of these symptoms are present it is important to inform your GP so that a sample of urine can be tested.

Ovarian cysts are common in early pregnancy and do not require any intervention if they are small. Occasionally they can become larger and may require some treatment later once the pregnancy is well established. You will be advised if an ovarian cyst is present when you are scanned.

It is safe to take paracetamol during the early weeks of pregnancy, if necessary, but do not exceed the recommended dose and if the pain is not controlled, seek medical advice.

# Flying Whilst Pregnant

**Useful information for flying whilst pregnant**

## **Flying Whilst Pregnant**

As long as you are deemed healthy by your doctor, flying when pregnant in the first trimester poses little risk to you or your unborn baby. The only exception is traveling on non-commercial flights where air pressure is not adjusted. This is because the amount of oxygen in the air decreases as altitude increases, potentially leaving you in short supply. However, if you travel by commercial airline you have no need to be concerned as air pressure in their cabins is adjusted so that there is sufficient supply of oxygen on board.



It is advisable to ask for an aisle seat so that you have clear access to the bathroom and keeping a sick bag to hand is a good idea in case of bouts of nausea. Seats situated level with the wings tend to provide the smoothest ride and are favourable if your stomach is already doing somersaults.

If you are suffering badly with sickness and nausea it can be a good idea to take your own snacks for the journey in case you are unable to stomach the food served on the plane. Dried fruit, biscuits or crackers can be conveniently kept in your hand luggage and will help to keep your energy levels up.

As amniotic fluid develops in the first trimester it is especially important to keep hydrated. The atmosphere on the plane can be quite dry so make sure you drink plenty of water and avoid caffeinated drinks.

The risk of deep vein thrombosis is slightly increased during pregnancy so you should aim to be as active as possible during your flight. Get up and walk around every hour and stretch your legs and feet every half hour to help boost circulation, Compression stockings are also a good idea.

### **Travel Insurance**

Before you embark on your travels make sure you are covered by a comprehensive health insurance policy. It is important to check that your policy provides sufficient cover for pregnancy-related treatments in case you fall ill while you are away. If you are unsure of what is covered by your policy, you should contact your insurance provider to check the details and arrange for an upgrade if necessary.

## **Exercising Whilst Pregnant**

### **Useful information about Exercising whilst pregnant**

Doing some form of exercise in pregnancy is beneficial to you and your developing baby.

Normally, moderate exercise during pregnancy is safe, however, some types of exercise need to be avoided. It is best to combine some aerobic exercise with exercise to help strengthen your muscles. Thirty minutes of exercise during pregnancy is ideal but it is recommended that you do not exceed 45 minutes.

### **Exercises that are considered to be safe in pregnancy.**

#### **Aerobic exercise:**

This is exercise that will make your heart beat faster and your lungs work harder. This helps to increase the flow of oxygen around your body and ensures a good oxygen supply is delivered to your developing pregnancy.

Examples of aerobic exercise are:

- Jogging
- Swimming



- Brisk walking
- Dancing

Exercises in Pregnancy to Strengthen Muscles:

These are exercises that will help strengthen your muscles and improve your overall fitness. Examples of muscle-strengthening exercises are:

- Yoga
- Climbing stairs
- Pelvic floor exercises

#### **Exercises that should be avoided in pregnancy:**

Exercises where you may lose your balance or fall such as skiing, ice skating, gymnastics, cycling and horse riding.

Exercises such as judo, boxing or kickboxing where there is a risk of injuring your stomach.

Scuba diving should be avoided as it can cause problems with the circulation in your developing baby due to the change in pressure.

Exercising while lying on your back after 16 weeks should be avoided as your baby may squash one of your main blood vessels, lowering your blood pressure and making you feel faint and lightheaded.

#### **Benefits of exercise in pregnancy:**

- Promotes a sense of well-being and helps reduce the risk of depression and anxiety in pregnancy.
- Helps to maintain a healthy weight in pregnancy.
- Reduces the risk of developing varicose veins, back pain and swelling of your feet and ankles.
- Reduces the risk of developing diabetes and high blood pressure during pregnancy.
- Muscle strengthening exercises during pregnancy can help to shorten labour and reduce the risk of complications when delivering your baby.

#### **Risks of exercise during pregnancy:**

You may get too hot because your body temperature increases more when you exercise during pregnancy. A high body temperature (above 39.2 degrees centigrade) during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy may affect the development of your baby. To reduce this risk make sure that you drink plenty of water during exercise, avoid overexerting yourself and avoid exercising when it is very hot or humid.

You are more prone to injury when exercising during pregnancy. This is due to hormonal changes that can make your joints looser and less stable. To avoid this you must do warm-up and cool-down exercises.

