



Pregnancy Helpful Hints

Common questions and comfort measures for a healthy pregnancy.

ALCOHOL & SUBSTANCE USE

- Avoid alcoholic beverages, cigarettes/tobacco/nicotine, and street drugs completely.

ANIMALS

- Don't change cat litter — this could expose you to a parasite called toxoplasmosis.
- Wear gloves while gardening.

BOWELS

To Avoid Constipation

- Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water per day.
- Eat plenty of fiber-rich foods — raw fruits and vegetables, whole grains, high-fiber cereal, bran, high-fiber granola bars, and cooked dried beans (you can also supplement with Metamucil, Fibercon, etc.).
- A stool softener (MiraLax, Colace, or Dulcolax) may be taken as needed — these are over-the-counter.
- If constipated, it's okay to use Milk of Magnesia.

Diarrhea

- If severe, stay on clear liquids for 24 hours and call if you have a temperature greater than 101°F.
- Kaopectate or Imodium AD may be used (no Pepto-Bismol).
- If symptoms persist longer than 48 hours, contact our office.

Hemorrhoids

- Anusol suppository.
- Tucks pads.
- Preparation H ointment or suppositories.
- Warm tub soak for 20 minutes at least twice a day.
- Avoid hard stool using the items listed under “To Avoid Constipation.”
- Do not strain during a bowel movement.

Gas

- Avoid gas-forming foods like cabbage, onions, and spicy foods.
- Tums or Gas-X may be used as needed.

CAFFEINE

- Limit caffeinated beverages such as regular coffee, tea, and cola to no more than 1-2 cups a day. Current guidance defines a safe limit as roughly 200 mg of caffeine per day or less — about one 12-oz cup of coffee; tea and soda generally contain less caffeine per serving.

COLDS

- Increase fluids.
- Rest.
- Tylenol, Vicks', Mucinex, Benadryl, Chlor-Trimeton, and plain Claritin (not Claritin-D) can be used as directed. Avoid decongestants containing pseudoephedrine — found in Sudafed and Claritin-D — especially during the first trimester, when they've been linked to a small increased risk of certain birth defects. After the first trimester, check with our office before using them.

Nasal Congestion

- Vaporizer.
- Tylenol Sinus (check that any combination product doesn't contain pseudoephedrine — see note above).
- Ocean nasal spray.
- Afrin nasal spray if Ocean nasal spray isn't adequate to relieve symptoms. Limit Afrin to no more than 3 days in a row to avoid rebound congestion.

Sore Throat and Cough

- Gargle with warm salt water.
- Throat lozenges.
- Tylenol pain reliever.
- Robitussin.
- Call if you have a temperature greater than 101°F.

Headache

- Extra-strength Tylenol — please do not take Advil, Aleve, Motrin, ibuprofen, or aspirin products. The FDA has warned that NSAIDs can cause rare but serious kidney problems in the baby, especially after 20 weeks — Tylenol remains the recommended choice throughout pregnancy.
- Ice packs or a cold washcloth around the back of the neck and forehead.
- Limit caffeine.
- Hydration and rest in a dark room.
- Call the office for headaches that don't improve with rest and Tylenol.

CRAMPS / CONTRACTIONS

Uterine

- Mild, intermittent cramping without bleeding (light spotting is normal) can be expected in the first trimester.
- Due to fetal growth and position, twitching and stabbing pains may be felt at various times, especially during the 5th and 6th month of pregnancy. Try Tylenol, rest, and increasing fluids to minimize discomfort.
- For **contractions**: If you are having more than 6 per hour, lasting 30 seconds or longer, you should proceed to labor and delivery at St. Luke's Boise Medical Center.

Leg

- Support hose.
- Increase calcium, potassium, and fluid intake.

DENTAL CARE

- We recommend dental check-ups at the beginning of pregnancy.
- If a root canal is needed, as indicated by your dentist, check with us first.
- Local anesthesia (without epinephrine) is okay, but no nitrous oxide (gas).
- X-rays are okay as long as your abdomen is protected by a lead apron.

EDEMA (SWELLING OF HANDS AND FEET)

- Increase water intake by 3-4 more glasses per day.
- Elevate your feet above heart level in the evenings, and as much as possible during the day.
- Decrease salt intake, soda pop, and other sodium-containing foods, especially processed food.
- Light exercise (walking).
- Follow a low-sodium diet.
- Swelling in the face, accompanied by headache, increased blood pressure, or abdominal pain needs to be evaluated — go to Labor and Delivery at St. Luke's Boise Medical Center.

EXERCISE

- Exercise is safe and even encouraged during pregnancy.
- As with any exercise, drink plenty of water and eat a healthy diet.
- Wear comfortable clothing.
- You may jog/run, especially if that was your normal practice before pregnancy. It's preferable to run in the morning or evening to prevent dehydration and overheating, particularly in summer.
- Avoid exercising flat on your back. After the first trimester (about 13 weeks), avoid traditional crunches and other exercises done lying flat on your back — the position can compress a major vein and reduce blood flow. Try seated, standing, or side-lying core exercises instead.
- Pregnancy-specific yoga, aerobics, or water aerobics are recommended. Swimming is also a great form of exercise during pregnancy.
- Stop exercising when you're tired.
- Changes in your body shape and size will limit the types of exercise you can do safely as your balance changes.
- Avoid exercise that could cause even mild trauma to the abdomen — no high-impact or contact sports (skiing, four-wheeling, soccer, football, basketball, etc.).
- If you have any concerns about an exercise program, talk with your physician before starting.

INDIGESTION / GAS / ACID REFLUX / HEARTBURN

- Avoid spicy foods.
- Drink a glass of milk before meals.
- Try a small amount of Maalox or Mylanta before eating if milk doesn't help.
- Do not use baking soda and water.
- Chew gum.
- Tums, Zantac, Prevacid, Pepcid, and Gas-X are acceptable over-the-counter options.
- Don't eat or drink 1-2 hours before lying down.

LABOR

- Contractions should be every five minutes, lasting 40-60 seconds, and feel stronger than menstrual cramps.
- You may leak amniotic fluid and blood-tinged discharge.
- When in doubt, go to the hospital and they will notify your doctor or midwife.

NAUSEA / MORNING SICKNESS

- Eat soda crackers before getting up each morning.
- Eat six small meals per day.
- A combination of Unisom 25mg and vitamin B6 25mg can be taken morning and evening — be aware that Unisom can make you drowsy. This combination is the same formulation as the FDA-approved prescription option for nausea in pregnancy and remains the recommended first-line treatment.
- Over-the-counter Sea-Band bracelets.
- For severe nausea, prescription anti-nausea medications are available.
- Ginger and peppermint (teas)

PAINTING

- Only paint in well-ventilated areas.
- Paint only if necessary.
- Use latex paint only — no oil-based paint.

SEAFOOD

- You can eat 2-3 servings (8-12 oz) per week of a variety of lower-mercury fish and shellfish, such as salmon, shrimp, tilapia, cod, and catfish. Limit albacore (“white”) tuna and similar fish to one serving (6 oz) per week. Avoid high-mercury fish entirely: shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish, marlin, and bigeye tuna.

SKIN IRRITATIONS

- Skin changes/irritations are very common in pregnancy. For mild skin irritations, you may use topical creams such as Benadryl cream or hydrocortisone cream. Call the office if there's no relief within 2 days or for severe cases.

SLEEP

- If you have trouble sleeping, over-the-counter options such as Unisom, Tylenol PM, low dose melatonin,, magnesium glycinate, or Benadryl may be used as needed.
- Speak with your provider if the above aren't helping.

SPOTTING

- Pelvic rest for a few days, while spotting.
- If cramping is associated with the bleeding, call the office. A small amount of spotting is normal after intercourse. Bleeding as heavy as a period is not normal — if you're less than 20 weeks, go to the nearest Emergency Department; if more than 20 weeks, go to Labor and Delivery.

TRAVEL

- Occasional air travel is generally considered safe up to 36 weeks in an uncomplicated single pregnancy (32 weeks if you're carrying twins); check your airline's specific policy, especially for international flights, which sometimes have earlier cutoffs. Call us before flying if you have any pregnancy complications.
- When traveling by air, book an aisle seat.
- If traveling by car, stop every hour to get out and walk around — this helps prevent blood pooling and leg cramping.
- Use of compression socks is recommended for travel.
- It's safe to take over-the-counter Dramamine.

WEIGHT GAIN / DIET

- Discuss appropriate weight gain with your provider.

PLEASE AVOID

- Saunas.
- Hot springs.
- Hot tubs.
- Tanning beds.

YOU MAY

- Use self-tanning cream.
- Have manicures and pedicures.
- Have maternity massages.
- Perm and color your hair in a well-ventilated area (a perm usually doesn't take well due to pregnancy hormones).