

Nausea and Vomiting During Pregnancy

Nausea and vomiting, sometimes called morning sickness or hyperemesis, is a common complaint during the first 3 months of pregnancy. About half of all pregnant women have nausea; of these, about one-third experience vomiting. Hormone changes and altered digestion often are linked to nausea and vomiting. Below is some information to help you deal with this problem.

*Contact your
doctor or nurse
if you are losing
weight or cannot
eat anything.*

Choosing Foods

Sometimes the hardest part about nausea/vomiting is finding a food item that appeals to you. Are you craving any particular food item? Does anything sound like it may be good to eat? Think of the different food qualities and try to find one that appeals to you.

| | | | |
|-------|--------|-------|----------|
| Salty | Dry | Spicy | Crunchy |
| Wet | Earthy | Sweet | Lumpy |
| Mushy | Bitter | Cold | Aromatic |
| Sour | Hot | Fizzy | Fruity |

If nothing in particular sounds good, what foods do you have on hand? To give you some ideas, below is a list of foods and liquids that may reduce nausea:

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|--------------|---|
| Crackers | Juice bars/Popsicles® |
| Pretzels | Chilled orange sections |
| Dry cereal | Teas – raspberry, mint, chamomile, etc. |
| Dill pickles | Lemonade |
| Grapes | Coca-Cola® |
| Watermelon | Ginger ale |

If there is nothing that appeals to you, try starting out with small sips of a clear liquid supplement or an instant breakfast product, such as Ensure Clear®, Boost Breeze® or Carnation Instant Breakfast®.

Although a balanced diet is extremely important during your pregnancy, right now the most important thing is to break the nausea/vomiting cycle. Tastes, cravings, nausea and vomiting will change throughout your pregnancy. Take it one day at a time. Try a few different foods each day.

You may need to start out with small, frequent feedings or meals. Small, in this case, may mean only 1 or 2 bites. Start with a few bites every 15 minutes. When this is working, try a few more bites every 30 minutes, then a few more bites every 45 minutes. In this way, slowly work your way to mini-meals every 2 hours.

In the beginning, liquids, especially “thin liquids” like water, may be a problem. Unless you crave a specific liquid, start your meal with a food item. However, don’t forget that liquid intake is important! To boost your liquid intake, try ice chips or frozen juice bars. Sometimes, a sour liquid like lemonade or a “flat” soda seems to stay down. You need to experiment to see what works best for you.

Triggers

Another important way to ease nausea and vomiting is to identify those things that may trigger this problem. Here is a list of common triggers and some suggested ways to deal with them.

| Triggers | Solutions |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Heightened Sense of Smell | <p>Remove or avoid bothersome odors. Some examples include strong cleaning agents, heavy perfumes, cigarette smoke, or strong-smelling foods (such as fish, garlic or onions).</p> <p>If you can’t remove the odor, put a fan on, open a window or leave the room.</p> <p>Carry a fresh lemon or fresh mint with you to mask the offensive odor.</p> <p>Sip drinks through a straw or from a cup with a lid.</p> <p>If the smell of hot foods bothers you, eat cold foods: sandwiches, main meal salads, cheese and crackers, etc.</p> <p>If you can’t stand the aroma of the food you’ve just cooked, eat something else.</p> <p>Consider cooking foods that do not have strong aromas or asking someone else to prepare food for you.</p> |
| Empty Stomach | <p>Don’t let your stomach get empty. If you wait until you feel hungry, it can be too late.</p> <p>Eat small, frequent meals.</p> <p>Carry snacks with you that don’t need to be refrigerated: peanut butter crackers, cheese crackers, raisins, dry cereal, etc.</p> <p>Have a snack before you go to bed at night, as you should never go longer than 10 hours over the night without eating.</p> |
| Fatigue | <p>Get plenty of rest.</p> |
| Stress | <p>Try to reduce your stress by doing away with unnecessary tasks. Ask for help or spend 15 to 30 minutes a day relaxing. Light exercise, such as walking, may help ease tension.</p> |

| Triggers | Solutions |
|------------------------|--|
| Sudden Movement | Try to wake up to soothing music instead of a jarring alarm. Let your stomach settle before you get out of bed. Sometimes it helps to eat saltines, dry cereal, or pretzels before you get out of bed to help settle your stomach. |
| Vitamins | If vitamins really upset you, talk with your doctor or nurse. If vitamins really upset you, talk with your doctor or nurse. Try taking them in the afternoon, before bed, or any time when nausea may be slightly improved. If they still bother you, ask your doctor about switching to a children’s chewable vitamin or gummy prenatal vitamins instead. |
| Toothpaste | Brush your teeth after breakfast, brush with water or try a children’s fruit-flavored toothpaste. |

Contact your doctor, clinic nurse or nurse practitioner if:

- **Nausea/vomiting does not improve or becomes worse.**
- **You are losing weight.**
- **You are unable to eat or drink anything.**

You may gradually be able to resume a more normal diet as your pregnancy progresses. You may also feel best continuing small, frequent meals. Remember to ask your doctor or dietitian if you have questions or concerns about your eating habits as your pregnancy progresses.

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363, the Northwestern Lake Forest Patient Relations manager at 847.535.8282 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

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