



Nausea, vomiting and hyperemesis in pregnancy

Many people experience nausea and vomiting in pregnancy. These symptoms often begin around 6 weeks of pregnancy and usually improve by about 14 weeks. For some people, symptoms can last longer.

Symptoms can range from mild to severe. Some people have no symptoms at all, while others develop a severe form of nausea and vomiting that may require hospital treatment. This condition is called hyperemesis gravidarum (or hyperemesis).

We don't know what causes nausea and vomiting in pregnancy, but changes in the levels of various hormones during pregnancy may play a role.

In most cases, your baby won't be affected if you're unwell.

When to contact your doctor or the hospital

Contact your doctor or the hospital if you:

- were not eating well before pregnancy
- have lost a lot of weight quickly
- are not getting enough fluids (dehydrated)
- feel worried about your health or your baby.

What is hyperemesis?

Some people experience severe and ongoing vomiting during pregnancy. This is hyperemesis.

Without treatment, hyperemesis can make it difficult to eat or drink enough. This can lead to:

- dehydration
- weight loss
- low levels of important vitamins and minerals.

For most people, hyperemesis improves between 13 and 20 weeks of pregnancy. However, some people continue to have symptoms their entire pregnancy.

Hyperemesis can have a big impact on your emotional, mental and physical health. It may make it difficult to work or take part in daily activities. The good news is that support and treatment are available, and symptoms often improve with the right care.

How do you know if you have hyperemesis?

Your healthcare provider may use a tool called the PUQE-24 scoring system to assess your symptoms. It looks at:

- how long you felt nauseated or sick to your stomach
- how many times you vomited or threw up
- how often you had retching or dry heaving without vomiting.

Your score helps your healthcare provider understand how severe your symptoms are and whether you need treatment.

What can you do to manage nausea and vomiting?

Stay hydrated

Drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration. Dehydration makes nausea and vomiting worse.

These tips will help you stay hydrated:

- drink small amounts often throughout the day
- sometimes, other fluids are managed better than water, so you could try drinking:
 - Hydralyte
 - flat lemonade
 - sports drinks like Gatorade
 - diluted fruit juice or cordial
 - smoothies, milky drinks, yoghurt or protein drinks if you can tolerate them
- drink sparkling water, soda water or mineral water if still water makes you feel sick
- suck on ice or icy poles if drinking is difficult
- try warm fluids like tea, miso soup, pho and broth
- eat juicy fruits like watermelon - they can help you stay hydrated and provide important nutrients
- some people find ginger helps relieve nausea, so you could try:
 - dry ginger ale
 - ginger tea
 - ginger tablets from your pharmacy.

To make ginger tea, soak 3 or 4 slices of fresh ginger in boiling water for 5 minutes. Sip slowly.

Tips to reduce nausea and vomiting

- Eat small meals and snacks often, instead of large meals.
- Avoid having an empty stomach. Snack on biscuits, fruit or toast between meals.
- Eat a dry or plain sweet biscuit before getting out of bed if you feel sick in the morning.
- Keep a snack nearby and eat during the night if you wake up feeling hungry or sick.
- Salty foods may help. Try potato crisps, salty biscuits or trail mix (including nuts).
- Suck on barley sugar or boiled sweets.
- Avoid fatty, rich or spicy foods like takeaways, curries, hot chips and chocolate.
- Eat when you feel your best and when you feel hungry.
- Eat cold foods if the smell of hot food makes you feel sick.
- Ask family or friends to help with cooking if cooking triggers your nausea.
- Choose simple meals that are quick and easy to prepare.
- Eat foods that appeal to you and avoid foods that don't.

Foods you may find easier to eat

If you feel nauseous, try eating small amounts of food often throughout the day. Some foods that people find easier to tolerate include:

- dry or plain sweet biscuits
- toast with honey, jam or Vegemite
- sandwiches with fillings like tomato, salad, Vegemite, cheese, peanut butter or tuna
- soups
- fresh or stewed fruit
- ice cream, custard or yoghurt
- grilled lean meat, chicken or fish
- boiled, poached or scrambled eggs
- boiled rice
- mashed potato.

How hyperemesis is treated

Treatment will depend on your symptoms. You may:

- Take medicine to help relieve severe symptoms. Take them as prescribed so they work effectively.
- Go to hospital for fluids through a drip (IV), if you can't drink enough fluids. Your healthcare team may recommend this 2 to 3 times a week.
- Stop your pregnancy multivitamin for a short time or change to a brand with less iron. Talk with your dietitian about your options.
- Drink as much as you can to stay hydrated and eat any foods you can tolerate.
- Gradually return to healthy eating as you start to feel better. Try small meals and snacks more often throughout the day. Your dietitian may also recommend a multivitamin supplement to replace nutrients you may have missed while unwell.

If you can't keep food or fluids down, go to the Women's Emergency Centre.

What about weight loss?

It's common to lose weight when you're unwell. A small amount of weight loss is unlikely to harm your baby. However, if you have ongoing vomiting and continue to lose weight, talk with your dietitian or doctor for advice. Your dietitian may recommend supplements to help prevent more weight loss.

You'll regain weight quickly once you can eat and drink normally again. Increase your food intake gradually until you can eat a balanced diet.

As your appetite improves, you'll be able to eat larger amounts and enjoy a wider variety of foods.

Aim to include foods from all 5 food groups. Each group gives your body different nutrients.

The food groups are:

- vegetables
- fruit
- grains, like bread, rice and pasta
- dairy foods and plant milks (like soy milk) with added calcium - this is called 'calcium-fortified'
- lean red meat, chicken, fish and eggs, and plant-based alternatives, like tofu, beans, lentils, nuts and seeds.

Drink at least 8 to 10 glasses of fluid each day.

Other things that may help

- Rest when you can. Nausea is often worse when you're tired.
- Try to reduce stress where possible.
- Ask family and friends for help and support when you need it.
- Some people find alternative treatments like acupuncture or hypnotherapy helpful. These treatments aren't routinely offered through your maternity service. Speak with your doctor or midwife if you'd like more information.

Support is available

Hyperemesis is serious medical condition that can have a major impact on your life. You deserve to be heard and get the treatment and support you need.

Don't hesitate to contact your health care provider to create a treatment plan that works for you.

Hyperemesis Australia

Hyperemesis Australia is a national charity that supports people experiencing pregnancy nausea and vomiting and hyperemesis.

Visit their website for more information - hyperemesisaustralia.org.au

Do you need an interpreter?



You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

Family Violence Support

1800 Respect National Helpline

You can get help if you have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

You can call any time of day or night.

1800 737 732

1800respect.org.au

For more information

Nutrition and Dietetics

T: (03) 8345 3160

Australian Dietary Guidelines

- Eat for Health
eatforhealth.gov.au

Fact sheets on the Women's website

- Healthy eating when you're pregnant
thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#healthy-eating-when-youre-pregnant
- Healthy eating when you're pregnant - Information for people who eat vegetarian or vegan diets
thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#healthy-eating-when-youre-pregnant-information-for-vegetarians-and-vegans
- Healthy eating when you're pregnant with twins
thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#healthy-eating-when-pregnant-with-twins

My plan to manage nausea and vomiting

Date:

My doctor's name:

Phone number:

My medicines

Write the name of each medicine in the first column. Tick the time of day when you take it.

Name of medicine	Morning	Middle of the day	Evening	Bedtime
Medicines for sickness or dry heaving (nausea or vomiting or retching)				
Medicines for stomach acid (reflux)				
Medicines for constipation				
Other medicines I take				
If I feel worse, I will:				
If I feel better, I will:				

My plan to manage nausea and vomiting

How I'm doing

Use this space to keep track of how well you're managing your nausea and vomiting. Think about how it affects different parts of your life.

Eating and drinking

Can you eat and drink enough each day? What foods or drinks help? What makes your symptoms worse?

Work or study

How have your symptoms affected your work, study, or daily activities this week?

Family and home life

How have your symptoms affected your family, relationships, or responsibilities at home?

Mood

How have you been feeling emotionally? Have your symptoms affected your mood, stress levels, or enjoyment of daily life?

Did you have IV fluids (a drip) this week? If so, when? Did it help?

Adapted from The Society of Obstetric Medicine of Australia and New Zealand, 2019, Individual patient management plan.
<https://www.somanz.org/content/uploads/2020/07/NVP-GUIDELINE-1.2.20-1.pdf>