

Morning Sickness (Hyperemesis)

Few symptoms of pregnancy are as well known and commonly experienced as morning sickness, also called hyperemesis [hi-per-eh-MEE-sis]. If you suffer from morning sickness, there are many things you can do to help reduce your symptoms. And if nothing works, your healthcare provider may be able to help.

What is morning sickness?

Morning sickness is nausea, and sometimes vomiting, during pregnancy. Morning sickness usually occurs early in pregnancy, and in most cases, clears up by the 4th month (12 to 16 weeks). And despite the name, you don't just get morning sickness in the morning. It can happen any time of day — morning, noon, or night.

What causes morning sickness?

No one knows for sure what causes morning sickness, but rising levels of hormones may play a role. Having morning sickness doesn't mean you are unhealthy. In fact, doctors estimate that between 50% and 90% of women experience some morning sickness as part of their normal, healthy pregnancies.

What can I do?

If you have morning sickness, try not to get discouraged. While it cannot be “cured,” it can be controlled. Try the tips on this handout. You'll need to experiment to find what works best for you. And what works may change from day to day, or even from hour to hour. So try to take it one day at a time!

Adjust your diet

- **Eat lightly, all hours of the day.** Nausea is often worse on an empty or too-full stomach. If you're on the go, carry food with you. If you get up during the night, have a few bites then as well.
- **Eat what appeals to you.** Generally you won't crave a food that will make you ill, so if it sounds good, try it.
- **Enjoy breakfast in bed.** Eat dry cereal, toast, or crackers before getting out of bed in the morning.



- **Eat bland foods.** Avoid spicy, fatty, salty, or ultra-sweet foods. Bland starches such as breads, rice, mashed potatoes, or pasta are often good choices, especially when combined with high-protein snacks like peanut butter and cheese. You can also try the B.R.A.T.T. diet (Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, Toast, and Tea).
- **Try ginger.** Many women report that ginger helps calm their stomachs. Try ginger snaps, ginger cookies, or ginger root capsules (250 milligrams, no more than 4 times a day). Teas with ginger (as well as herbal teas) may also help.
- **Drink up.** Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of fluids a day — especially when you're queasy. This will help you stay hydrated and avoid constipation. Sip liquids slowly, or through a straw.
- **Drink sweet.** Many women find bubbly, cold, sugary drinks (like Sprite) helpful, while others prefer drinks flat and at room temperature. Sugar seems to be the key. You might also try sports drinks, such as Gatorade.

Shift your schedule, and slow down

You may need to rethink your many roles and obligations. Learn to say “no.” Give yourself permission to manage the stress that morning sickness can cause. It’s smart, not selfish, to take care of yourself right now.

- **Slow down.** Allow for rest periods in your day, and learn to pace yourself (do a little, rest a little). Don’t try to maintain the same schedule or level of activity as you did before your pregnancy.
- **Arrange your resting environment.** Rest when you can in a cool, dark, quiet room with plenty of fresh air. Keep a phone, a bowl, drinks, and snacks nearby so you won’t have to get up.
- **Brush a little later.** Delay brushing your teeth in the morning if you find it makes you sick. Instead, wait to brush until your stomach feels more settled.
- **Time your vitamins.** Prenatal vitamins and iron may cause nausea, especially when taken during the day. Try taking them with food at the end of the day. Or, switch to a children’s chewable. Just make sure it contains folic acid, as recommended by your healthcare provider.
- **Make it a family affair.** Ask your partner or a friend to help by bringing you drinks or snacks while you rest. If you have small children, pack the next day’s lunches the night before, so you can move more slowly in the morning.

Other suggestions

- **Avoid strong or unpleasant smells.** Keep your home and bedroom well ventilated — open your windows and use exhaust fans while cooking.
- **Try motion sickness bands.** These work by applying pressure at a special point on your wrist. You can buy them at most pharmacies.

- **Ask about antacids and vitamin B6.** Antacids can help decrease that “sour stomach” feeling and relieve burning in your throat after throwing up. Vitamin B6 can reduce symptoms of morning sickness. Ask your healthcare provider for guidelines for both.
- **Spit out your spit.** It’s common for women with morning sickness to have a lot of saliva, and unfortunately swallowing saliva often makes nausea worse. Tart foods and drinks (like lemonade) or candies (like lemon drops or mints) sometimes help.

Ask for help!

Occasionally morning sickness can become severe enough to cause dehydration and chemical imbalances. This can lead to a condition called **hyperemesis gravidarum** [grav-eh-DARE-um]. In this case, you may need additional treatment.

Call your healthcare provider if you have any of the following symptoms:

- You’re not peeing very often and it’s dark brown in color
- You can’t keep liquids down
- You feel dizzy or faint when you stand up
- Your heart pounds or races
- You vomit blood
- You are losing weight quickly

If you’ve tried many of the suggestions in this handout and you are still struggling, ask your care team for help! You might also call your insurance plan and request to speak to a nursing care manager. Many plans have nurses who are there just to help you during your pregnancy.

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