



Early Pregnancy Symptoms

It wouldn't be difficult knowing we were pregnant if our uterus came complete with flashing lights and twirling tassels which activate when conception has occurred! But unfortunately, we can only rely on hormonal changes that occur within in our body.

You may start noticing pregnancy symptoms and/or be able to detect pregnancy after implantation, which occurs from around 7-10 days post ovulation. If you have conceived, the embryo starts to produce hCG after implantation and not before, so it is not possible to detect pregnancy or have pregnancy symptoms before this time. So the longer you wait to test after ovulation, the more accurate the result will be and the darker the potential positive test line may be. Pregnancy testing should ideally be done from the day your period would have been due.

What pregnancy symptoms can I look out for?

Below is a list of symptoms which you may find signal pregnancy for your own body. Remember, every woman and every pregnancy is different, so there's no need to panic if you don't have all of the listed pregnancy symptoms. I had absolutely no noticeable symptoms (apart from not having a period) with my second pregnancy until 11 weeks.

High BBT (Basal Body Temperature)

If you regularly chart your cycle and take your temperatures, you will notice that your BBT will remain high throughout your luteal phase. Progesterone causes your BBT to rise upon ovulation and stay elevated should you be pregnant. If you are not pregnant, your BBT will drop right down and you'll get your period as normal.

Missed / No Period

One of the first signs of pregnancy you may notice is that your period does not arrive. While this symptom is one we most commonly associate with pregnancy, there may be other reasons why a period hasn't arrived, for example high levels of stress, major illness or surgery. On the other hand, it's possible to continue to have your periods during pregnancy. Some women may bleed for just a few months or even their whole pregnancy. (See our topic on Bleeding in Pregnancy for more information).

Morning Sickness

Another well known pregnancy symptom is morning sickness. Don't let it's name fool you – morning sickness can pay you a visit any time of day, so make sure you eat enough and avoid letting your blood sugar levels drop. Ginger is a great natural remedy for nausea so it's worth a try, although some women find that nothing seems to help their morning sickness, which normally hangs around for the first trimester before getting better or if you are unlucky, the second trimester or even whole pregnancy. (See our topic on Common Pregnancy Ailments for more information).

Breast Changes

Very early on in pregnancy you may notice changes in your breasts, including:

- Nipples may be tender and sensitive – some women describe their nipples to be irritatingly sensitive!
- Breast may be sore and / or lumpy
- Nipples may deepen in colour
- Veins may become more noticeable and enlarged in the breast area
- Areolas may darken (circles around your nipples)
- The little 'bumps' on your areolas (Montgomery's Tubercles) may increase and/or enlargen

Increased Cervical Mucus

A surge in progesterone often results in a surge of creamy cervical mucus production. Some women may notice a little amount and some will notice much more.

Fatigue

When you first become pregnant, your metabolism steps up a few gears in order to support your developing baby as well as your own body, which creates one big workload! You may become so immensely tired that you feel that you need to sleep more than usual. Not only that, but the hormone progesterone which is required in high levels during pregnancy has a sedating effect. No wonder you feel so very tired! If you need to rest or sleep, don't fight your body – it needs it!

Frequent Urination

As soon as a week after conception, you may notice yourself dashing off to the toilet more often, only to find that you're urinating small amounts! This happens because the embryo starts to secrete the pregnancy hormone hCG, which signals for the blood supply to increase in the pelvic area. This results in the bladder becoming irritable and it passes even small amounts of urine. You may find you will wake in the night to urinate more often than usual.

Cramping

This symptom of early pregnancy can also be an unnerving one for parents-to-be, as often there is a fear of miscarriage. However even when not pregnant, your uterus is continually contracting. When pregnant, the foetus grows and pushes against the walls of your uterus, which causes it to contract – this is very normal.

If the cramping is accompanied by bleeding, see your doctor who can assess the situation to see if you may be having a miscarriage. However do not panic as bleeding is also common in pregnancy – see our article on ‘Bleeding in Pregnancy’ for more information. Women can have both cramping and bleeding in pregnancy and be able to continue on with a healthy pregnancy.

Spotting

At around 8-10 days after ovulation (just before you would normally get your period) you may notice light spotting, which is caused from the implantation of the embryo into your uterus lining. The spotting is usually pinkish in colour and not red like a normal period.

Constipation & Wind

It just keeps getting better doesn't it?! Increased hormones have an effect on your intestines, making them more relaxed – this helps with making more space for the baby as your uterus expands. As a result you may get constipated. Luckily there are some constipation remedies available over the counter from your pharmacist that are safe for pregnancy – do check with the pharmacist first though.

Sense of Smell

No it's not just because your partner hasn't washed his socks for a week – pregnancy can heighten your sense of smell! Smells which never bothered you before may become intolerable, causing nausea. Food and cooking smells are usually the culprit, however every woman is different and may dislike all sorts of smells.

Nasal Stuffiness / Colds

A foetus is very clever, even at an early age. In a healthy pregnancy, your immune system is suppressed and prevented from attacking and rejecting the foetus as if it were an foreign object by hormones and antibodies the foetus produces. The antibodies also take part in the growth and development of the placenta. As a result of these hormonal changes to your immune system, you are more susceptible to colds and flu. Nasal stuffiness is also very common in pregnancy due to the hormonal effects on the nasal passages.

Pimples / Acne

You may find that even if you don't usually get pimples or acne, you may get them in early pregnancy. It will most likely settle down fairly quickly after your hormone levels stabilise, however make sure that you do not pick or squeeze pimples which may leave scars and/or spread bacteria.

Cravings / Changes in Taste

The rising hormone levels in your blood can reflect in your saliva. You may notice a metallic taste in your mouth which alters the taste of foods you usually enjoy or the feeling of food in your mouth. Some women will not eat meat and some women gag when brushing their teeth from their toothpaste!

You may have heard stories of women craving strange things which are not foods at all, some of these cravings include dirt, clay or chalk. This is a condition called Pica.

No-one really knows why pregnant women have cravings, it is believed from some evidence that the body is craving vitamins and minerals it is deficient in. If you have a craving, there is nothing wrong with giving in to them, however if you are craving high fat foods or food with little nutritional value, see if you can find a substitute. If you are not yet taking pregnancy multivitamins, it might be a good time to start. You might like to consider taking some [In-Liven](#)

Change in Colour of Your Vagina

Due to the increased level of blood in the pelvic region, you may find your vagina will appear more purplish than normal.

Testing for Pregnancy

As mentioned above, it's important to try to wait until your period would have been due before testing, as the pregnancy hormone hCG may not be at a high enough level to be detected by a pregnancy test, which may only result in disappointment. Perhaps you can distract yourself for two weeks by planning a special treat for yourself at the end of each day for not testing! You might also like to read our article on the two week wait for some light hearted humour!

Doctors Tests

When you have a positive pregnancy test, your doctor will do a few tests of his/her own. These may include:

Urine Test – Your doctor may ask you to perform another pregnancy test in his clinic.

Blood Test – Doctors may test for all sorts of different things, so if you'd like to know something specific, ask them. For example, my doctor never measured my hCG levels when I knew some doctors did. He told me that the positive urine pregnancy tests were enough convincing for him that I was pregnant. The second time my new GP felt it was something my Obstetrician would do anyway and again, a positive pregnancy test was enough convincing for him.

Some levels which may or may not be tested include hCG, your blood type (if you don't know your blood type or if you are rhesus negative – see our topic on rhesus negative blood), iron levels, HIV and levels of antibodies you might have for other conditions relevant to pregnancy, for example Rubella.

Internal/Pelvic Exam – Some doctors may perform an internal, others may leave it up to your Obstetrician, depending on what sort of care you choose. Internals are often the norm at your first ante-natal appointment with your Obstetrician, as it's a very good indicator of pregnancy – your cervix and uterus become more soft and swollen/enlarged than usual during pregnancy. While a little uncomfortable, an internal should not be painful and you do have the right to say no to an internal, as it's not essential.

For Conception, Pregnancy, Birth & Baby ~ BellyBelly