COPING WITH COMMON DISCOMFORTS OF PREGNANCY

Your body is constantly changing now that you are pregnant, which may cause discomfort. Some discomforts may occur in the early weeks of pregnancy, while others occur only as you get closer to delivery. Other discomforts may appear early and then go away, only to come back later. This is normal and usually does not mean something is wrong.

Every woman's pregnancy is unique, and some of the discomforts described in this article may not affect you. Discuss any concerns about discomforts you are having with us.

**Breast Changes**

Most pregnant women will feel some changes in their breasts. Your breasts will increase in size as your milk glands enlarge and the fat tissue increases, causing breast firmness and tenderness in the first and last few months of pregnancy. Bluish veins may also appear as your blood supply increases. Your nipples will also darken and a thick fluid called colostrum may leak from your breasts. All of these breast changes are normal.

**Recommendations:**

- Wear a bra that provides firm support.
- Choose cotton bras or those made from other natural fibers.
- Increase your bra size as your breasts become larger. Your bra should fit well without irritating your nipples. Try maternity or nursing bras, which provide more support and can be used after pregnancy if you choose to breastfeed.
- To ease discomfort and maintain support, try wearing a bra during the night and day.
- Tuck a cotton handkerchief or gauze pad into each bra cup to absorb leaking fluid. Nursing pads, which you can buy in a pharmacy, are also available. Make sure to change these pads as needed to prevent irritation to the underlying skin.
- Clean your breasts with warm water only; do not use soap or other products since they can cause dryness.

**Fatigue**

Your growing baby requires extra energy, which may make you feel tired. Sometimes, feeling tired may be a sign of anemia (low iron in the blood), which is common during pregnancy.

**Recommendations:**

- Get plenty of rest; go to bed early at night and try taking naps during the day.
- Maintain a regular schedule when possible but pace your activities; balance activity with rest when needed.
- Exercise daily to increase your energy level.
- If you think anemia may be a concern, we will test your blood.
COPING WITH COMMON DISCOMFORTS OF PREGNANCY (Cont’d)

Nausea or Vomiting

Nausea is a result of hormonal changes and most often occurs early in pregnancy until your body adjusts to the increased production of hormones.

Nausea can begin in early pregnancy, but is usually gone by the fourth month. It can occur at any time of the day but may be worse in the morning when your stomach is empty (this is often called "morning sickness") or if you are not eating enough.

Recommendations:

• If nausea is a problem in the morning, eat dry foods like cereal, toast or crackers before getting out of bed. Or, try eating a high-protein snack such as lean meat or cheese before going to bed (protein takes longer to digest).

• Eat small meals or snacks every 2-3 hours rather than three large meals. Eat slowly and chew your food completely.

• Sip on fluids throughout the day. Avoid large amounts of fluids at one time. Try cool, clear fruit juices, such as apple or grape juice.

• Avoid spicy, fried or greasy foods.

• If you are bothered by strong smells, eat foods cold or at room temperature and avoid odors that bother you.

• Talk to Dr. Shifrin about taking vitamin B6 or other treatments.

• Contact Dr. Shifrin if your vomiting is constant or so severe that you can't keep fluids or foods down. This can cause dehydration and should be treated right away.

Frequent Urination

During the first trimester, your growing uterus and growing baby press against your bladder, causing a frequent need to urinate. This will happen again in the third trimester when the baby's head drops into the pelvis before birth.

Recommendations:

• Avoid tight-fitting underwear, pants or pantyhose.

• Contact Dr. Shifrin if your urine burns or stings. This can be a sign of a urinary tract infection and should be treated right away.
Headaches can be caused by tension, congestion, constipation, or in some cases, preeclampsia. They can occur anytime during pregnancy.

**Recommendations:**

- Apply an ice pack to your forehead or the back of your neck.
- Rest, sit or lie quietly in a low-lit room. Close your eyes and try to release the tension in your back, neck and shoulders.
- Try Tylenol (acetaminophen) occasionally. Ask your doctor before taking any other medications for your headaches.
- Contact Dr. Shifrin if you have nausea with your headaches, if your headache is severe and does not go away, or if you have blurry vision, double vision or blind spots.

**Bleeding and Swollen Gums**

The increase in your circulation and supply of certain hormones may cause tenderness, swelling and bleeding of gums.

**Recommendations:**

- Take proper care of your teeth and gums. Brush and floss regularly.
- Get a dental checkup early in your pregnancy to make sure your teeth and mouth are healthy. See your dentist if you have a problem.

**Constipation**

Your hormones as well as vitamins and iron supplements may cause constipation (difficulty passing stool or incomplete or infrequent passage of hard stools). Pressure on your rectum from your uterus may also cause constipation.

**Recommendations:**

- Add more fiber (such as whole grain foods, fresh fruits and vegetables) to your diet.
- Drink plenty of fluids daily (at least 6 to 8 glasses of water and 1 to 2 glasses of fruit or prune juice).
- Drink warm liquids, especially in the morning.
- Exercise daily.
- Set a regular time for bowel movements; avoid straining when having a bowel movement.
- Discuss the use of a laxative with us; we may recommend natural fiber laxatives or stool softeners.

**COPING WITH COMMON DISCOMFORTS OF PREGNANCY (Cont’d)**

**Dizziness (Feeling Faint)**

Dizziness can occur anytime middle to late pregnancy. The pregnancy hormone progesterone dilates blood vessels so blood tends to pool in the legs. In addition, more
blood is going to your growing uterus. This can cause a decrease in blood pressure, especially when changing positions, resulting in dizziness.

Faintness and dizziness can also be affected by poor eating habits. When your blood sugar levels are too low, you may feel faint.

Recommendations:

• Move around often when standing for long periods of time.
• Try lying on your left side to rest.
• Try to move slowly when standing from a sitting position; avoid sudden movements.
• Eat regular meals to prevent low blood sugar.

Difficulty Sleeping
Finding a comfortable resting position can become difficult later in pregnancy.

Recommendations:

• Don't take sleep medication.
• Try drinking warm milk at bedtime.
• Try taking a warm shower or bath before bedtime.
• Use extra pillows for support while sleeping. Lying on your side, place a pillow under your head, abdomen, behind your back and between your knees to prevent muscle strain and help you get the rest you need. You will probably feel better lying on your left side; this improves circulation of blood throughout your body.

Heartburn or Indigestion
Heartburn (indigestion) is a burning feeling that starts in the stomach and seems to rise to the throat. It occurs during pregnancy because your digestive system works more slowly due to changing hormone levels. Also, your enlarged uterus can crowd your stomach, pushing stomach acids upward.
COPING WITH COMMON DISCOMFORTS OF PREGNANCY (Cont’d)

Heartburn and Indigestion (cont’d)

Recommendations:

• Eat several small meals each day instead of three large meals.
• Eat slowly.
• Drink warm liquids such as herbal tea.
• Avoid fried, spicy or rich foods, or any foods that seem to give you indigestion.
• Don't lie down directly after eating.
• Keep the head of your bed higher than the foot of your bed. Or, place pillows under your shoulders to prevent stomach acids from rising into your chest.
• Don't mix fatty foods with sweets in one meal and try to separate liquids and solids at meals.
• Try heartburn relievers such as Tums, Maalox, Titralac, Mylanta, Riopan or Gaviscon.

Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins that appear as painful lumps on the anus. They may form as a result of increased circulation and pressure on the rectum and vagina from your growing baby.

Recommendations:

• Try to avoid constipation; constipation can cause hemorrhoids and will make them more painful.
• Try to avoid sitting or standing for long periods of time; change your position frequently.
• Make an effort not to strain during a bowel movement.
• Apply ice packs or cold compresses to the area or take a warm bath a few times a day to provide relief.
• Avoid tight-fitting underwear, pants or pantyhose.
• Discuss with Dr. Shifrin the use of a hemorrhoid treatment.

Varicose Veins

An increased volume of blood and the pressure of your growing uterus can slow your circulation, sometimes causing the veins in your legs to become larger or swollen.
COPING WITH COMMON DISCOMFORTS OF PREGNANCY (Cont’d)

Varicose Veins (cont’d)

Recommendations:

• Avoid standing or sitting in one place for long periods. It's important to get up and move around often.
• Avoid remaining in any position that might restrict the circulation in your legs (such as crossing your legs while sitting).
• Elevate your legs and feet while sitting.
• Exercise regularly.
• Wear support hose but avoid any leg wear that is too tight.

Leg Cramps

Pressure from your growing uterus can cause leg cramps or sharp pains down your legs.

Recommendations:

• Be sure to eat and drink foods and beverages rich in calcium (such as milk, broccoli or cheese).
• Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.
• Try wearing support hose but avoid any leg wear that is too tight.
• Elevate your legs when possible; avoid crossing your legs.
• Exercise daily.
• Stretch your legs before going to bed.
• Avoid lying on your back, since the weight of your body and the pressure of your enlarged uterus can slow the circulation in your legs, causing cramps.
• Gently stretch any muscle that becomes cramped by straightening your leg, flexing your foot and pulling your toes toward you.
• Try massaging the cramp, or apply heat or a hot water bottle to the sore area.

Nasal Congestion

You may have a "stuffy nose" or feel like you have a cold. Pregnancy hormones sometimes dry out the lining in your nose, making it inflamed and swollen.

Recommendations:

• Apply a warm, wet washcloth to your cheeks, eyes and nose to reduce congestion.
• Don't use nose sprays; they can aggravate your symptoms.
• Drink plenty of fluids (at least 6 to 8 glasses of fluids a day) to thin mucus.
• Elevate your head with an extra pillow while sleeping to prevent mucus from blocking your throat.
• Use a humidifier or vaporizer to add moisture to the air.

**COPING WITH COMMON DISCOMFORTS OF PREGNANCY (Cont’d)**

**Shortness of Breath**
Shortness of breath can occur due to increased upward pressure of the uterus

**Recommendations:**
• When walking, slow down and rest a few moments.
• Raise your arms over your head (this lifts your rib cage and allows you to breathe in more air).
• Avoid lying flat on your back, and try sleeping with your head elevated.

**Swelling in the Feet and Legs**
Pressure from the growing uterus on the blood vessels carrying blood from the lower body causes fluid retention that results in swelling (edema) in the legs and feet.

**Recommendations:**
• Try not to stay on your feet for long periods of time. Avoid standing in one place.
• Drink plenty of fluids (at least 6 to 8 glasses of fluids a day).
• Avoid foods high in salt (sodium).
• Elevate your legs and feet while sitting. Avoid crossing your legs.
• Wear loose, comfortable clothing; tight clothing can slow circulation and increase fluid retention. Don't wear tight shoes; choose supportive shoes with low, wide heels.
• Keep your diet rich in protein; too little protein can cause fluid retention.
• Notify Dr. Shifrin if your hands or face swell. This may be a warning sign of preeclampsia.
• Rest on your side during the day to help increase blood flow to your kidneys.

**Vaginal Discharge**
Normal vaginal discharge is white or clear, non irritating, odorless and may look yellow when dry on your underwear or panty liners.

**Recommendations:**
• Choose cotton underwear or brands made from other natural fibers.
• Avoid tight-fitting jeans or pants.
• Do not douche. It is possible that you can introduce air into your circulatory system or break your bag of waters in later pregnancy.
• Clean the vaginal area often with soap and water.
• Wipe yourself from front to back.
• Contact your Dr. Shifrin if you have burning, itching, irritation or swelling, bad odor, bloody discharge, or bright yellow or green discharge (these symptoms could be a sign of infection).

COPING WITH COMMON DISCOMFORTS OF PREGNANCY (Cont’d)

Backaches
Backaches are usually caused by the strain put on the back muscles, changing hormone levels and changes in your posture.

Recommendations:
• Wear low-heeled (but not flat) shoes.
• Avoid lifting heavy objects.
• Squat down with your knees bent when picking things up instead of bending down at the waist.
• Don't stand on your feet for long periods. If you need to stand for long periods, place one foot on a stool or box for support.
• Sit in a chair with good back support, or place a small pillow behind your lower back. Also place your feet on a footrest or stool.
• Check that your bed is firm. If needed, put a board between the mattress and box spring.
• Sleep on your left or right side with a pillow between your legs for support.
• Apply a hot water bottle, heating pad on low setting, take a warm bath or shower or try massage.
• Perform exercises, as advised by Dr. Shifrin, to make your back muscles stronger and help relieve the soreness.
• Maintain good posture. Standing up straight will ease the strain on your back.
• Contact Dr. Shifrin if you have a low backache that goes around your stomach and does not go away within one hour after you change position or rest. This might be a sign of premature labor.

Abdominal Pain or Discomfort
Sharp, shooting pains on either side of your stomach may result from the stretching tissue supporting your growing uterus. These pains may also travel down your thigh and into your leg.

Recommendations:
• Change your position or activity until you are comfortable; avoid sharp turns or movements.
• If you have a sudden pain in your abdomen, bend forward to the point of pain to relieve tension and relax the tissue.
• Apply a hot water bottle, heating pad or take a warm bath or shower.
• Try massage.
• Make sure you are getting enough fluids.
• Take Tylenol (acetaminophen), occasionally.
• Contact Dr. Shifrin if the pain is severe or constant or if you are less than 36 weeks pregnant and you have signs of labor.