

# Morning sickness, when does it start? And, can I do anything to help?

It's often a question Mums think about when they find out they are pregnant. When will morning sickness start, usually quickly followed by when might it end? The arrival of morning sickness for some mums will be a blessing in disguise. On one hand, you may find it reassuring to know your pregnancy is going well and progressing and on the other hand it's annoying and sometimes debilitating. Morning sickness, to some degree, affects around 50-80% of all pregnant Mums and usually starts around week 3 - 10 often clustering around week 4- 6.

There is a big range of morning sickness, and it can vary from pregnancy to pregnancy, symptoms are often described from anything such as a bad hangover, really bad motion sickness to the more severe version known as Hyperemesis Gravidarum (HG) which affects around 2% of all pregnant women. If you are vomiting multiple times in the day, having trouble keeping fluids and food down - you may have HG. You should seek medical advice, as you may be at risk of serious dehydration.

Some pregnant Mums will experience morning sickness in the morning when they first wake and for others it may be - the middle of the night or any time during the day, making it difficult to plan outings or interrupting work commitments. Food, certain smells or food textures may also be a trigger for some.

## **So, you may be wondering what causes morning sickness?**

Despite the fact that it's such a common pregnancy complaint, researchers still do not understand fully what causes morning sickness. Certainly, it seems that pregnancy hormones, particularly hCG (human chorionic gonadotropin) have a large role to play. hCG levels peak at around 10 weeks of gestation, which is when most women will have the worst symptoms of nausea and vomiting. However, hCG might not be the only culprit involved. Changes in the levels of oestrogen, and the thyroid hormone, thyroxin, may also have a role to play. Other possible causes include blood pressure changes, and changes to the way your body metabolises carbohydrates during pregnancy.

## **I bet you're now wondering, is there anything that I can do to help?**

Different remedies seem to work for different women. Try a few different remedies, but listen to your body until you find what works best for you.

Food matters, you may not want to eat but it's important you eat, at least a little. What you eat and how much can help with symptoms settling, as our blood sugar levels affect how we feel - too high or too low can increase the nausea. One tip that's been handed down through generations is bland toast or crackers first thing in the morning. But these can actually make your symptoms worse, as simple carbs will lower your blood sugar levels making you feel worse as your insulin levels will spike. Protein is your friend and there are many sources of protein, including animal products (meat, dairy and eggs), nuts and seeds, and grains and legumes. Other foods that may help are protein smoothies, fruit with yoghurt, apple with nut butter, scrambled egg on toast.

Acupuncture and acupressure, practices that have been around for thousands of years may also help. Research has shown both are a safe and effective treatment for pregnancy sickness. Women who have found acupuncture helpful recommend having a session every week to maximise the benefits. Choose a practitioner who specialises in pregnancy care. An easier way to use acupressure yourself is using ravel sickness bands. People who experience motion sickness or sea sickness tend to use them. The bands are made of elastic and have plastic studs to stimulate acupuncture points. Most women find they need to wear the band constantly, else their morning sickness returns when they remove it. Seek advice from a health care professional for correct positioning.

Pregnant women are very prone to dehydration and losing electrolytes – particularly if they have been vomiting or not drinking as much water as they should. Adding electrolytes to your daily routine could make a huge difference. Some women opt for pre-made drinks or they add an electrolyte powder to water. Avoid supermarket-stocked sports drinks like Gatorade and Powerade – they're full of sugar, which can cause insulin spikes and inflammation. You may prefer to make your own home-made electrolyte solution and freeze it in cubes. Sucking on ice cubes is a great way to stay hydrated, especially when swallowing food or fluids triggers a gag reflex.

We often expect seeing something to be a trigger for morning sickness, but quite often it's the smell! If possible, clean out all areas where you're likely to come across strong smells, such as your fridge, rubbish bins, and bathrooms, better still, organise someone else to do it for you. Use a citrus-based, non-toxic cleaner, and regularly clean areas, such as cooktops, that are likely to accumulate smells. Some women say the smell of a cut lemon eases their nausea.

Ginger is another remedy that has been handed down for tummy upsets. Ginger contains many chemicals, two in particular called gingerols and shogaols. These chemicals help relax your tummy and ease nausea. There are many different ways you can take ginger – drinking it as a tea, nibbling ginger biscuits, or having some nonalcoholic ginger ale.

Acceptance is often our last resort, there is no doubt that nausea and vomiting is a physical condition but let's not rule out the power of your mind either. Cultivating an attitude of acceptance that the nausea you're experiencing is an integral part of this part of your pregnancy journey can help. Of course, you may not be able to rid yourself of morning sickness altogether. When the waves of nausea hit, instead of resisting, try stilling your mind, breathe quietly and allow the waves to subside. This may not always work, but with practice, you might find that you are able to control the milder bouts.

Trial and error and a whole heap of patience may be needed, if something doesn't work, try again tomorrow. Hopefully, the first remedy you try works well and you are rocking pregnancy like a Queen again.

