

Patient information from BMJ

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Morning sickness

When you're pregnant it's normal to feel sick at times, and sometimes to vomit. You might find that some simple treatments can help.

We've brought together the best and most up-to-date research about morning sickness to see which treatments work. You can use our information to talk to your doctor and decide which treatments are best for you.

What is it?

Most pregnant women feel sick and even vomit sometimes during pregnancy. For many women these are the first signs that they are pregnant. Some women view these symptoms as signs that their pregnancy is probably healthy.

Nausea and vomiting usually begin around six weeks after the start of your last period. This is often called 'morning sickness', because many women find that their symptoms are worst in the mornings. But women can get these symptoms at any time of the day.

Even if you are sick two or three times a day, you will usually be able to keep some food down. You probably won't lose weight during the first few months of your pregnancy. And your morning sickness won't affect your baby unless it is severe.

Although it's normal to feel sick or be sick when you're pregnant, it's not normal to be so sick that you can't hold down any food or fluids for more than 24 hours. If this happens you can become dehydrated and you may need to be treated in hospital to replace the fluids and nourishment you're losing.

If you feel like you can't hold down any fluids for more than 24 hours, or if you feel dizzy, or if you're worried about your condition, you should see your doctor.

What treatments work?

Things you can do to help yourself

As well as treatments that your doctor may suggest, here are some things that you might find helpful in reducing feelings of sickness.

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- Eating little and often (for example, every two to three hours) rather than eating big meals
- Eating bland food, such as dry crackers or toast
- Eating ginger biscuits
- Avoiding fatty foods
- Drinking lots of liquid (but avoiding alcohol and caffeine)
- Eating something salty early in the day
- Drinking sour liquids, such as unsweetened fruit juices, rather than plain water
- Getting some fresh air and exercise daily.

If morning sickness bothers you so much that you need to see your doctor, the treatment you are offered will depend on how severe your symptoms are. For example, if you become dehydrated this can harm your growing baby, so your doctor will make sure you get treatment quickly.

But doctors usually try to avoid giving medicines for morning sickness, as they will want to expose your growing baby to as few drugs as possible.

So if your symptoms are not severe your doctor will probably suggest some non-drug treatments first. There isn't as much research as we'd like on these treatments. But some women find that they help.

Treatment without drugs

Ginger

Ginger is a natural remedy and one of the most widely used treatments for nausea and vomiting. It is a spicy root used to flavour food such as gingerbread, biscuits, and stir-fried vegetables. It's also found in drinks such as ginger tea, ginger ale, and ginger beer.

But you probably won't get enough ginger by eating or drinking foods that contain it. You'll need to take supplements. But this should be supervised by your doctor. You can get ginger supplements as capsules, or as a syrup. These supplements seem to reduce symptoms of nausea and vomiting in most women.

Acupressure

Wearing an acupressure wristband over a certain place on your forearm (called the P6 point) seems to help reduce nausea and vomiting in some women. But some women find that the wristband causes numbness, soreness, and swelling.

Acupuncture

Some women find that acupuncture helps relieve their morning sickness symptoms.

Treatment with drugs

If you are getting a lot of nausea and vomiting, your doctor may recommend a type of drug called an **antihistamine**. Antihistamines are drugs that are usually used to relieve

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allergies, such as hay fever. But you shouldn't take these for morning sickness unless they are prescribed by your doctor.

Your doctor might suggest an **anti-emetic**. These are drugs that help to stop you from feeling sick and from vomiting.

Vitamin B6 supplements may make you feel less sick, and reduce the number of times you vomit. Vitamin B6 is usually contained in multivitamin supplements for pregnant women. But the dose of vitamin B6 in these supplements may not be as high as that found to relieve nausea and vomiting in pregnancy. Doctors will sometimes prescribe higher levels of vitamin B6 to treat morning sickness. But it's not available everywhere. For example, it is not recommended in the UK because of concerns that high levels might harm unborn babies.

What will happen to me?

The good news is that morning sickness usually gets better after the first three months of pregnancy. But for some women it can go on longer. About 10 in 100 women still feel sick after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

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