

Hemorrhoids: You may develop hemorrhoids for the first time in pregnancy or they may become worse. The most important step in prevention and treatment is to avoid straining to have a bowel movement. If you are having problems with constipation, follow the steps outlined above. If you have already developed hemorrhoids, the use of sitz baths and witch hazel compresses may help. You can also find a list of safe medications for use in the back of the handout.

Leg cramps: The most common cause of this is deficiencies or imbalances in minerals our body needs. Avoid soft drinks and processed snack foods that may contain large amounts of phosphorus and low amounts of calcium. Daily exercises, such as walking, swimming, and gentle stretching can help. If a cramp does occur, make sure to flex foot, with leg straight – avoid toe pointing.

Nosebleeds: Nosebleeds in pregnancy are quite common due to an increase in blood volume and blood vessel formation. To help prevent these, keep your nasal passages moist. This can be accomplished by using a cool mist humidifier to increase humidity and decrease nasal irritation and by using normal saline nasal drops.

Shortness of breath: Increases in metabolism, oxygen demands by baby, hormonal changes, and pressure on the diaphragm can cause a sensation of shortness of breath. Practicing prenatal yoga can help. Prenatal shortness of breath is rarely a problem; however, if your symptoms are worsening, you feel like you are breathing too fast, or you have chest pain, please let your provider know.

Skin changes: Stretch marks are notorious in pregnancy. Although it is difficult to prevent stretch marks and there is no effective treatment, keeping the abdomen moist with lotion, aloe, or Vitamin E can be tried. Changes in skin pigmentation is another skin change pregnant women may see. These include chloasma, which appears as darkened areas of discoloration, mostly to the face, and linea nigra, which is a darkened line down the center of the abdomen. Both are caused by hormonal changes in pregnancy and often fade after completion of pregnancy.

Swelling in the lower extremities: As your uterus grows, it can cause problems with swelling in your lower legs. Standing for long periods of time can often make this worse; therefore, resting, with your legs elevated, throughout the day can help. If you must be on your feet, support hose can improve circulation. If you decide to use support hose, ensure they do not have elastic bands around the thighs, as these can dig into your skin.

Getting adequate exercise helps move the fluid in your body and prevents it from “pooling” in your lower legs. This swelling is not caused from drinking too much water/fluids. If you notice an increase in swelling that is accompanied by visual changes, headaches, or upper abdominal pain, contact your provider.

Vaginal discharge: An increase in vaginal discharge can be normal in pregnancy. Normal discharge is often clear or white in color, but may appear slightly yellow when dry. It does not have an odor and does not cause itching or burning. With the additional discharge, good hygiene is important. Wearing cotton underwear can help prevent infection. If you do notice a change in your vaginal discharge accompanied by odor, itching, or burning, contact your provider.