

# Experiencing nausea & vomiting during pregnancy?

Tips and tricks for improved well-being.

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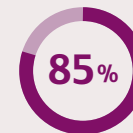




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## Key points in brief



Approximately **85%** of pregnant women suffer from nausea and vomiting during pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>



The myth of “morning sickness”: Very few pregnant women only suffer from it in the morning. In 4 out of 5 women, the symptoms occur throughout the day.<sup>2</sup>



Symptoms usually reach their peak between the 9th and 12th week of pregnancy.

For most women, the symptoms subside again at the end of the first trimester. However, around 10% of pregnant women suffer from nausea and/or vomiting throughout their pregnancy.<sup>3,4</sup>



**Important: Nausea and vomiting in the first trimester of pregnancy are not signs that something is wrong.**

As long as your nausea is mild or moderate and temporary, it is not dangerous for your baby. Nevertheless, the symptoms are very debilitating for many women and should not be trivialised or underestimated.

### Look after yourself!

This is the key to a good relationship with yourself, your partner and your baby. Try to be aware of your needs from the start and seek support. Statements like “You just have to get through it” are not only insensitive, they're also wrong because there are different ways you can get rid of pregnancy sickness.



## Why am I feeling sick?

It is not known exactly what causes nausea and vomiting during pregnancy. Different triggers have been discussed:

- **genetic factors**
- **hormonal factors**
- **psychological factors**, such as stress
- **gastrointestinal** (affecting the stomach and intestines) **factors**.<sup>5-7</sup>

The best-known hypotheses see the reason as having to do with these hormones:

1

**Human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG):** This hormone increases dramatically during the early weeks of pregnancy and stimulates the development of the hormone progesterone,<sup>8</sup> which is important for maintaining a healthy pregnancy. hCG levels in the blood are highest towards the end of your first trimester. Exactly when the symptoms of nausea and vomiting are at their most severe.<sup>9</sup>

2

Another hypothesis states that the hormone **GDF15** increases the risk of severe nausea and vomiting. This is produced during pregnancy. The severity of the symptoms depends on how high the hormone level increases during pregnancy. Women who already have high levels of the GDF15 hormone in their blood before pregnancy have fewer problems.<sup>10</sup>



# When will I feel better?

Most women experience nausea in the first three months of pregnancy. This is because during this time your body is adapting at full speed to the fact that you're "expecting". Nausea often begins 4 to 6 weeks after your last period. **By the end of the first trimester, symptoms usually subside for most women**, but in around 10% of pregnant women the nausea persists throughout their entire pregnancy.<sup>3,4</sup>



# Nausea and vomiting – what is “NORMAL”?

By “normal” pregnancy sickness doctors usually mean a mild to moderate form – i.e. when the nausea does not stem from an illness and it is not the severe form known as “hyperemesis gravidarum”. **However, this doesn't mean that the symptoms are not debilitating** or limiting for you. “Normal” pregnancy sickness is also suitable for treatment.

In very rare cases, 0.3–3% of affected women experience the **severe form** of pregnancy sickness - “**hyperemesis gravidarum**”.<sup>5,6</sup> Typical features of hyperemesis gravidarum include decreased food intake and constant vomiting, inadequate absorption of nutrients and weight loss of over 5%. You feel miserable and are restricted in or no longer able to carry out daily activities, including self-care and responsibilities. This illness **should receive immediate medical attention and requires a stay in hospital**.

**The sooner you talk to your doctor about your pregnancy sickness, the better.**

# Why see the doctor early?



Seeing a doctor early can stop your condition from getting worse: If nausea and vomiting have persisted for a long time, it may become more difficult to alleviate the symptoms.



Treatment in the early stages, however, can prevent possible complications, including hospital stays.



If the nausea only occurs later in the pregnancy, women should have tests carried out to see whether the symptoms are caused by an illness.



# Psychological stress

Pregnancy sickness is debilitating and its impact is not to be underestimated. It not only affects physical well-being, it can also affect mental balance and lead to emotional stress. Happy, smiling women with their baby bumps as portrayed in the media increase many women's doubts about "doing everything right". The pregnancy is not yet visible in the first trimester and women find it difficult to demand understanding without revealing themselves. It can lead to conflicts at the workplace since having nausea makes it difficult to think clearly and concentration and resilience decrease. Even within the couple relationship, the feeling of illness sometimes overshadows the joyful anticipation. This is the time when couples want to go out in the evening one more time, go on a short holiday, spend more time together. Many know from friends or from their own experience that the early days with a newborn leave little room for them as a couple.

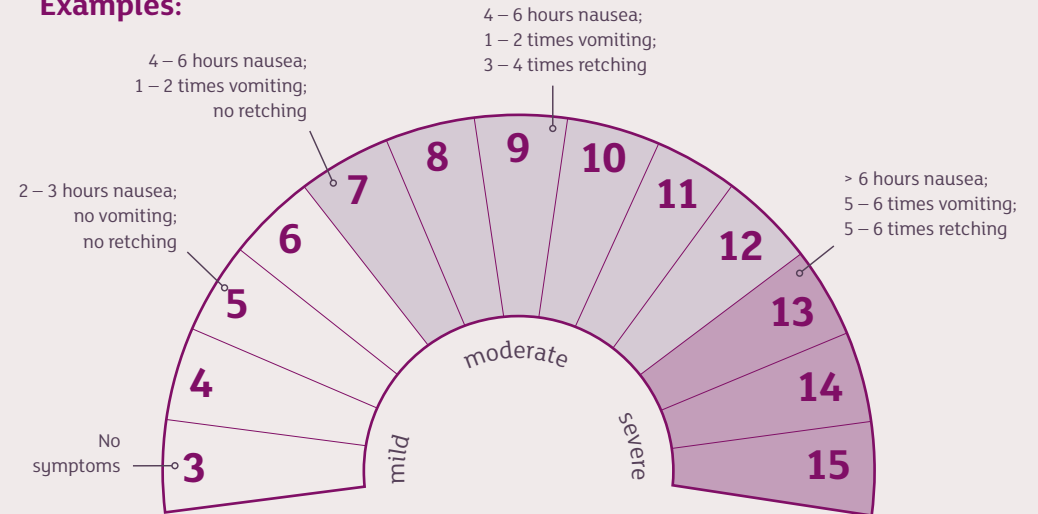
The more severe the symptoms, the more impact the pregnancy sickness has on everyday life. The partner often has to step in and take on responsibilities. Medical treatment for nausea and vomiting can help to overcome these phases and help you to feel good again.

**So ask your doctor for advice as early as possible!**

# How sick am I?

No matter how mild or severe your symptoms are, nausea is not “just something that comes with the territory” and something can be specifically done about it. To determine the severity, it often helps to use an appropriate scale: The **PUQE score** (Pregnancy-Unique Quantification of Emesis and Nausea) is a **rating system to determine the severity of nausea and vomiting during pregnancy**.<sup>11,12</sup> In addition, the **course of symptoms** can be recorded through regular assessment in order to determine **changes**.

## Examples:



Fill in now and discuss with your doctor.

## PUQE-SCORE<sup>11,12</sup>

(Pregnancy-Unique Quantification of Emesis and Nausea)

	Points					
	1	2	3	4	5	Result
In the last 24 hours, for how long have you <b>felt nauseated or sick to your stomach?</b>	not at all <input type="radio"/>	1 hour or less <input type="radio"/>	2–3 hours <input type="radio"/>	4–6 hours <input type="radio"/>	6 hours or more <input type="radio"/>	
In the last 24 hours, have you <b>vomited or thrown up?</b>	not at all <input type="radio"/>	1–2 times <input type="radio"/>	3–4 times <input type="radio"/>	5–6 times <input type="radio"/>	7 or more times <input type="radio"/>	
In the last 24 hours, how many times have you had <b>retching or dry heaves without bringing anything up?</b>	not at all <input type="radio"/>	1–2 times <input type="radio"/>	3–4 times <input type="radio"/>	5–6 times <input type="radio"/>	7 or more times <input type="radio"/>	
<b>Total score</b> (≤ 6 = mild   7–12 = moderate   13–15 = severe)	The scores from all three answers are added together to determine the severity of nausea and vomiting during pregnancy.					

# What can I do?<sup>7,13</sup>



## Breakfast in bed

Have a light breakfast (e. g. rusks and some tea) in bed in the morning and then stay there for another 20 minutes or so.



## Avoid triggers

Certain smells like that of meat, perfume or coffee can cause nausea. But heat, humidity and noise can also be a factor. Keep a diary to find out which individual factors trigger your nausea so that you can avoid them in the future.



## Eat foods that are gentle on the stomach and drink a lot

Make sure you eat foods that are high in protein and carbohydrates. It is particularly helpful to divide your meals into 6 to 8 small portions and eat them slowly and throughout the day. Avoid foods that are high in fat, acid, spices or sweetened. Drinking enough fluids is also very important. Preferably choose cold, clear drinks such as unsweetened tea or heavily diluted fruit juice spritzers. Drinking them in small sips, especially between meals, can counteract the nausea. Ginger (e. g. as ginger tea or ginger biscuits) can also help.



## Relax

Take short breaks and do simple mindfulness exercises now and then. A pleasant conversation can also help. Short walks in the fresh air are also recommended as they help you to boost your metabolism and take your mind off it.



## What else?

Some women find acupuncture helpful, which is offered by midwives, gynaecology practices and clinics, for example. Another option is aromatherapy with essential oils such as bergamot, grapefruit, mandarin, neroli, peppermint or lemon. Some pregnant women also try out homeopathy, acupuncture or hypnosis. However, the effectiveness of these alternatives is not scientifically proven.



# Can I use medicine for nausea and vomiting?

Switching to a new lifestyle is not always enough to relieve nausea and vomiting during pregnancy. Especially during pregnancy, it is advisable to always discuss any symptoms and taking medicines **with your doctor**.



## Are there any approved medicines for pregnancy?

There are special medicines approved for the treatment of nausea and vomiting during pregnancy. Find out from your gynaecologist what options are available to you.



## Effective and tolerable

The use and safety of these approved prescription medicines, especially for pregnant women, have been scientifically tested and confirmed over decades and in many pregnancies.<sup>14,15</sup>



## What about those without a prescription?

It is now no longer possible to take some of the over-the-counter medicines that you used to be able to take for nausea and vomiting before you became pregnant. Over-the-counter medicines for nausea are not approved for use specifically during pregnancy and should **only be taken after talking to your doctor**.



## Help and advice

So ask your doctor for a remedy that is right for you. They will **prescribe or recommend a medicine that is approved for use in pregnancy**. Other places or people you can go to for help and advice are your pharmacy and your midwife.



## Easy to take and practical

The medicine should be easy to swallow, as it is more difficult to take when you feel sick. **The smaller the tablets and the fewer of them you have to take, the easier they usually are to use. This reduces any hindrances to taking them.**



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