



Pregnancy is divided into three periods, known as trimesters. Each last about 13 weeks. The trimesters are roughly equivalent to specific developmental stages.

First trimester: A baby's body and organ systems begin their initial development. This is the period during which most miscarriages and birth defects occur. It is also when women tend to experience morning sickness, fatigue, and other pregnancy-related symptoms. By the end of the first trimester, the average fetus is 3 inches long and weighs about an ounce.

Second trimester: During the second trimester, a baby grows skin and hair, and even develops fingerprints. A heartbeat can be heard with a stethoscope. For moms, morning sickness tends to fade, and sleep improves. But other problems, such as back pain, leg cramps, and heartburn, may appear. The baby's first movements are usually felt during the second trimester. By its end, the average baby is about 14 inches long and weighs more than 2 pounds. Babies delivered at the end of the second trimester may be able to survive with the help of medical technology.

Third trimester: The final stretch for baby and mother. It's a time of rapid growth and maturation for the baby. Toward the end of the third trimester, the baby usually moves into the "head down" position in preparation for birth. At 38 weeks, the baby is considered full term and can make its appearance at any time. Because the baby is getting so big, a mom can experience shortness of breath, hemorrhoids, and trouble sleeping. Toward the end of the third trimester, the average baby is 19 to 21 inches long and weighs between 6 and 10 pounds.

2nd trimester pregnancy: What to expect

The second trimester of pregnancy is often the most enjoyable. Find out how to relieve common symptoms — and consider ways to prepare for what's ahead.

The second trimester of pregnancy often brings a renewed sense of well-being. The worst of the nausea has usually passed, and your baby isn't big enough to make you too uncomfortable. Yet more pregnancy symptoms are on the horizon. Here's what to expect.

Your body

During the second trimester of pregnancy, you might experience physical changes, including:

- **Growing belly and breasts.** As your uterus expands to make room for the baby, your belly grows. Your breasts will also gradually continue to increase in size. A supportive bra with wide straps or a sports bra is a must.
- **Braxton Hicks contractions.** You might feel these mild, irregular contractions as a slight tightness in your abdomen. They're more likely to occur in the afternoon or evening, after physical activity or after sex. Contact your health care provider if the contractions become regular and steadily increase in strength. This could be a sign of preterm labor.

- **Skin changes.** Hormonal changes during pregnancy stimulate an increase in pigment-bearing cells (melanin) in your skin. As a result, you might notice brown patches on your face (melasma). You might also see a dark line down your abdomen (linea nigra). These skin changes are common and usually fade after delivery. Sun exposure, however, can aggravate the issue. When you're outdoors, use sunscreen. You might also notice reddish-brown, black, silver or purple lines along your abdomen, breasts, buttocks or thighs (stretch marks). Although stretch marks can't be prevented, most eventually fade in intensity.
- **Nasal problems.** During pregnancy, your hormone levels increase and your body makes more blood. This can cause your mucous membranes to swell and bleed easily, resulting in stuffiness and nosebleeds. Saline drops or a saline rinse can help relieve congestion. Also, drink plenty of fluids, use a humidifier, and dab petroleum jelly around the edges of your nostrils to help moisten skin.
- **Dental issues.** Pregnancy can cause your gums to become more sensitive to flossing and brushing, resulting in minor bleeding. Rinsing with salt water and switching to a softer toothbrush can decrease irritation. Frequent vomiting could also affect your tooth enamel and make you more susceptible to cavities. Be sure to keep up your dental care during pregnancy.
- **Dizziness.** Pregnancy causes changes in circulation that might leave you dizzy. If you're having trouble with dizziness, drink plenty of fluids, avoid standing for long periods, and move slowly when you stand up or change position. When you feel dizzy, lie down on your side.
- **Leg cramps.** Leg cramps are common as pregnancy progresses, often striking at night. To prevent them, stretch your calf muscles before bed, stay physically active, and drink plenty of fluids. Choose shoes with comfort, support and utility in mind. If a leg cramp strikes, stretch the calf muscle on the affected side. A hot shower, warm bath or ice massage also might help.
- **Vaginal discharge.** You might notice a sticky, clear or white vaginal discharge. This is normal. Contact your health care provider if the discharge becomes strong smelling, unusual in color, or if it's accompanied by pain, soreness or itching in your vaginal area. This could indicate a vaginal infection.
- **Urinary tract infections.** These infections are common during pregnancy. Contact your health care provider if you have a strong urge to urinate that can't be delayed, sharp pain when you urinate, urine that is cloudy or has a strong smell or you have a fever or backache. Left untreated, urinary tract infections can become severe and result in a kidney infection.

Your emotions

During the second trimester, you might feel less tired and more up to the challenge of preparing for your baby. Check into childbirth classes. Find a doctor for your baby. Read about breast-feeding. If you will work after the baby is born, get familiar with your employer's maternity leave policy and investigate child care options.

You might worry about labor, delivery or impending parenthood. To ease your anxiety, learn as much as you can. Focus on making healthy lifestyle choices that will give your baby the best start.

Prenatal care

During the second trimester, your prenatal appointments will focus on your baby's growth and detecting any health problems. Your health care provider will begin by checking your weight and blood pressure. He or she might measure the size of your uterus by checking your fundal height — the distance from your pubic bone to the top of your uterus (fundus).

At this stage, the highlight of your prenatal visits might be listening to your baby's heartbeat. Your health care provider might suggest an ultrasound or other screening tests this trimester. You might also find out your baby's sex — if you choose.

Be sure to mention any signs or symptoms that concern you. Talking to your health care provider is likely to put your mind at ease.

When You Visit Your Doctor - Pregnancy: 2nd Trimester

Pregnancy: 2nd Trimester

Questions to Discuss with Your Doctor:

- How do you feel? Have you had any problems since your last visit?
- Have you had any vaginal bleeding or spotting?
- Have you had persistent vomiting?
- Have you had any pain or uterine cramping?
- Have you noticed swelling of your face or fingers?
- Have you had any problems with your vision?
- Are you getting frequent headaches?
- Have you had any vaginal discharge?
- Have you noticed fetal movement?
- Are you planning to breast-feed or bottle-feed?

Your Doctor Might Examine the Following Body Structures or Functions:

- Blood pressure, weight
- Abdominal exam including measurement of the height of your fundus (top of the uterus) and using a portable Doppler instrument or stethoscope to measure fetal heart sounds

Your Doctor Might Order the Following Lab Tests or Studies:

- Consider repeat complete blood count
- Fetal ultrasound
- Glucose tolerance test