

## Diarrhea in Early Pregnancy, Gastroenteritis in Pregnancy and other Gut Problems

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### Abstract

Diarrhea during pregnancy is one of the unfortunate discomforts that may be experienced. Diarrhea literally means “flowing through” and is defined as having three or more loose or liquid bowel movements in a 24 hour period. If you are experiencing three runny, watery bowel movements in one day, the main concern is to stay hydrated. Dehydration can be serious, even deadly. Drink plenty of water and avoid soda and coffee. Diarrhea is rarely life-threatening, but it shouldn't be taken too lightly, especially while pregnant.

**Keywords:** Diarrhea; Pregnant; Water; Nutrients

### Introduction

#### Causes of Diarrhea during Pregnancy

When you first find out you are pregnant, you may make sudden changes in your diet to make sure your baby is getting the nutrients they need. If you change the food you eat, that can sometimes cause an upset stomach or diarrhea. Another reason diarrhea occurs is because some pregnant women become sensitive to particular foods. These could be foods you have eaten often before, but eating them while pregnant can give you an upset stomach or diarrhea. Another cause of diarrhea during pregnancy is hormonal changes. Sometimes hormones can cause your digestive process to slow down, and at times that can lead to diarrhea. Every pregnant woman has these hormonal changes, but some will experience diarrhea early in their pregnancy from those changes. Bacterial or viral infection can also cause diarrhea [1].

#### Diarrhea during the third trimester of pregnancy

Diarrhea during the third trimester is not as uncommon and is more likely to happen as you approach your due date. It could be a sign that labor is near, and it can occur right before labor or a couple of weeks before labor. If it is a couple of weeks before your due date, a premature birth should not be expected.

If you are experiencing diarrhea during your third trimester, it does not mean your baby is coming right now, so you should not be alarmed. This is just a way some women's bodies prepare for the labor that is going to start at some point. You may want to be aware of other labor signs as well.

Most cases of diarrhea will clear up on its own within a couple of days. The main concern of diarrhea is staying hydrated. Make sure you drink plenty of water, juice, and broth to rehydrate yourself and replace the electrolytes your body has lost. The water will help replenish your lost fluids, the juice will help replenish your potassium levels and the broth will help replenish your sodium [2].

If your diarrhea doesn't clear up on its own you may need to consult your health-care provider. If diarrhea during your pregnancy is caused by bacteria or parasites, you may need antibiotics. If a virus is causing your diarrhea, antibiotics will not help. To determine the cause, you will need to speak with your health care provider.

#### Traveler's Diarrhea and Pregnancy

Traveler's diarrhea is a common illness that affects travelers each year. The onset of traveler's diarrhea usually happens within a week

of travel but could start at any time while traveling. It is important to know the area of your destination. Higher risk areas are in developing countries in South America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The main source of traveler's diarrhea is consuming food or water contaminated with fecal matter [3].

#### Remedies for diarrhea during pregnancy

##### Avoid certain foods

Keep away from foods that could make the problem worse: dried fruits (consider prunes your enemy); fatty or spicy foods; and milk, especially if you're lactose intolerant. The so-called BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce, toast) has been recommended for years because it's gentle on your digestive system and can help make stools firmer and more solid.

However, the newest thinking expands on those options to include other important vitamins and minerals (especially zinc) that are not provided by the BRAT diet. Other starchy foods like potatoes, unsweetened cereals and crackers

Cooked vegetables including carrots, peeled zucchini, green beans, beets and acorn squash, Non-milk-based soups with vegetables, Lean meats, cooked eggs, Yogurt especially with live, active cultures of *Lactobacillus acidophilus*

Also be sure to avoid eating a few foods that can make diarrhea worse:

"Simple" high-sugar drinks (apple and grape juice, gelatin, regular colas and other soft drinks), which can draw water into your tummy, making diarrhea last even longer [4].

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### Fatty and fried foods

Gas-causing fruits and vegetables, such as beans, broccoli, peas, prunes and chickpeas.

Dairy products, if they're causing gas or other intestinal upset.

### Drink plenty of water

Also key Staying hydrated which is important throughout your pregnancy, but especially when diarrhea strikes. The recommended amount varies based on your body type and size, and how active you are, but aim for eight to 10 ounce glasses of water (from all sources) a day. Ask your doctor about sipping a sports drink with electrolytes, which can replenish lost fluids plus key minerals like sodium, chloride and potassium. Ask about medications. Always check with your doctor before taking any over-the-counter diarrhea medications. And of course, if you're on a stool softener for constipation in pregnancy, be sure to stop taking it until your stools return to a normal consistency [5].

Trimester is associated with a number of changes in the body, many of which can influence the Gastro Intestinal (GI) system such as heartburn, nausea, diarrhea in early pregnancy, or constipation.

### Causes of Gastro Intestinal issues during pregnancy

Pregnancy can intensify underlying conditions, even if you weren't aware of them before your egg got fertilized. There are a number of lifestyle and medical reasons behind gastrointestinal problems during pregnancy:

- Changes in hormones
- Obesity, sedentary lifestyle, and poor diet
- Antacids with calcium or aluminum
- Certain medications
- Viral or bacterial infection
- Food intolerances and allergies
- Stress
- Thyroid disorders

### Discussion

If you have chronic GI problems, like IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), acid reflux, or GERD (Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease), their symptoms will most likely intensify during pregnancy. So if you are planning a pregnancy, consult your doctor for advice. Pregnancy and diarrhea often happen together. Diarrhea in pregnancy first trimester (and second) is usually mild, but having the runs because of an upset stomach during pregnancy 3rd trimester is most common. Symptoms of diarrhea include:

- Loose watery stools 3+ times per day
- Urgent frequent need to have a bowel movement
- Abdominal cramps or pain
- Bloating
- Nausea

In daily life, reasons for diarrhea can range from bacterial and viral infections to food poisoning and medications. However, loose stools

in pregnancy and diarrhea during early pregnancy are often caused by hormonal and dietary changes, stress, and underlying conditions like IBS [6].

Diarrhea 5 weeks pregnant is one of the first signs that the body is slowly transforming to accommodate the growing fetus. For example, oxytocin levels increase during pregnancy this hormone also speeds up movement in your digestive tract.

That's why, basically, first trimester diarrhea and diarrhea during pregnancy 2nd trimester may be a sign that your body is slowly working up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester and labor. Occasional loose stools in early pregnancy, including diarrhea in the second trimester, and diarrhea at 16 weeks pregnant don't mean there is anything wrong with you [7].

### Risks of diarrhea in pregnancy

Persistent diarrhea while pregnant without proper treatment can result in dehydration, malnutrition, electrolyte imbalance, loss of weight, and it might pose a threat to your baby's health. If you have the following symptoms, immediately get medical assistance:

- Blood or mucus in your stool
- Weight loss
- Fever
- How to stop diarrhea when pregnant

If you experience diarrhea whilst pregnant, avoid foods that can make it worse, like dairy, caffeine, and anything with high fat and sugar levels. Dehydration is an important risk, so you should take steps to restore your body's electrolyte balance with liquids and plain foods [8, 9].

### Conclusion

Normally, gastroenteritis lasts about three days. However, severe gastroenteritis when pregnant should be taken seriously because it can cause dehydration and electrolyte imbalance which, if not treated properly, can cause complications such as preterm birth [10].

So, now you have all the necessary knowledge and instruments that will help you be prepared and handle the GI symptoms during pregnancy. Gastrointestinal pregnancy symptoms are quite versatile, so here are some main red flags when you must immediately get medical assistance:

- Vomiting blood
- Blood in stool during pregnancy or black stools
- Dramatic weight loss
- Severe pains that interfere with daily life
- Choking
- Pain or difficulty swallowing
- Extreme fatigue

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Not Applicable

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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