



The Third Trimester

What changes can I expect in the third trimester?

The third trimester is the "home stretch" of your pregnancy! As your baby grows, your body will feel even more awkward and heavy. Everyday things—like getting out of bed or rising from a chair—will require extra effort. The tiredness you felt early in pregnancy may return, making naps a good idea. You might also start to feel more emotional as you prepare for labor, delivery and parenthood. But you'll enjoy feeling your baby move. The "nesting instinct" may kick in, and you may feel an urge to clean the house and make final preparations for bringing your baby home. Take it slowly so you don't wear yourself out.

Will sleeping be difficult?

As you get bigger, you might struggle to find a comfortable sleeping position and find it harder to change positions. Side sleeping will be best. Sleeping on your left side helps blood circulation. Sleeping on your back will be uncomfortable because the weight of your baby presses on the veins in your lower back, slowing the return of blood from the lower body to the heart. You need to avoid sleeping on your stomach altogether. Just remember to try and fall asleep on your left side when you go to bed, and if you wake up, return to that position before going back to sleep. Putting a pillow between your knees or behind your back may make you feel more comfortable.

Other things interfering with sleep may include:

- Leg cramps, which may be related to the pressure your uterus puts on the nerves and blood vessels that go to your legs
- Restless legs syndrome, in which you feel an urge to move your legs, often because of an unpleasant feeling in them
- Heartburn, the burning feeling in your lower chest, which may worsen as your uterus crowds your stomach out of its usual position. Ask your doctor if you can take a chewable antacid if needed.
- Nasal congestion, caused by increased blood flow to the mucous membranes in the nose and mouth
- Your baby's movements
- The need to urinate, which will increase as the baby grows and changes position
- Strange dreams, which some women have in the last weeks of pregnancy

Will I still want to have sex?

You might lose the desire for sex, partly because of your size and partly because you're preoccupied with getting ready for labor, delivery and parenthood. But it's still OK to have sex, unless your doctor has told you not to.

What else might I notice in the third trimester?

Varicose veins. These are bluish, swollen, sometimes painful veins beneath the surface of the skin. They often show up on the backs of the calves or the inside of the legs.

Hemorrhoids. These are varicose veins in the rectum. They may stick out of the anus and cause itching, pain and sometimes bleeding. Ask your doctor about taking a stool softener (**not** a laxative) if you haven't been doing so already.

Causes include:

- Pressure that your growing uterus puts on the large veins behind it, which slows blood circulation
- Pregnancy hormones, which cause the walls of veins to relax and possibly swell
- Constipation, which makes you strain to pass hard bowel movements
- Increased fluid retention

Puffiness. Fluid retention and slowed blood circulation are to blame for swelling in the legs, ankles, feet, hands and face. If swelling in your hands and face becomes extreme—especially if it's accompanied by headache, blurred vision, dizziness and belly pain—call your doctor. These may be signs of a dangerous condition called **pregnancy-induced hypertension** (also called preeclampsia).

Tingling and numbness. The swelling in your body may press on nerves, resulting in tingling and numbness in the legs, arms and hands. The skin on your belly may feel numb, too, because it is so stretched out. Tingling and numbness in the hands usually occurs because of **carpal tunnel syndrome**, which is caused by pressure on a nerve within the wrist. An easy way to relieve some of these symptoms is to wear a “wrist splints” at night when you are sleeping. Fortunately, the problem usually ends after pregnancy.

Aching back, pelvis and hips. This may have started in the second trimester. The strain on your back will increase as your belly grows larger. Your hips and pelvic area may hurt as pregnancy hormones relax the joints between the pelvic bones in preparation for childbirth. Sleeping with a pillow behind your back may help with the pain.

Abdominal pain. The muscles and ligaments (tough, ropelike bands of tissue) that support the uterus will continue to stretch as your baby grows, and they may be painful.

Shortness of breath. As your uterus grows upward, your lungs will have less room to expand. You may find yourself huffing and puffing more.

More breast growth. Your nipples may leak colostrum. If you breastfeed, this fluid will be your baby's first food.

Vaginal discharge. Discharge may increase toward the end of your pregnancy. If you have any fluid leaking or see any blood, call your doctor immediately.

Less fetal movement. As your baby continues to grow, he or she starts running out of room to move around in your uterus, so you might notice fewer movements throughout the day. If you don't feel your baby move 10 times over an hour or if you're concerned about the lack of movement, call your doctor right away.