



Welcome to the Second Trimester

How will I feel in the second trimester, compared with the first?

Most women who didn't feel so great in the first trimester of pregnancy usually start to feel much better in the second. The nausea and vomiting of morning sickness should taper off, mood swings may lessen, and you'll probably have more energy. This will be a good time to tackle many tasks necessary to get ready for your baby.

You'll gain weight more rapidly this trimester, adding as much as 4 pounds a month for the rest of your pregnancy. This means you may need to start wearing maternity clothes.

When will I feel my baby move?

You'll likely start to notice fluttering movements deep in your belly near the middle of the second trimester. Your baby was moving earlier, but you probably weren't aware of it. If you've been pregnant before, you might notice the movements earlier because you're familiar with how they feel.

Will my breasts continue to get bigger?

Your breasts may not be as tender as they were in the first trimester, but they will continue to grow and prepare for breastfeeding. Enlarging milk glands and deposits of fat cause the growth. You may also notice that the skin on and around your nipples will darken, and you might have small bumps around the nipples. The bumps are glands that make an oily substance to keep the nipples from drying out. A yellowish fluid called colostrum might begin to leak from your nipples.

What are stretch marks and can I prevent them?

As your skin stretches to fit your growing body, some areas of skin may become stretched tight. Elastic fibers right below the skin may tear, creating streaks of indented skin called stretch marks. Stretch marks are likely to occur on your belly and breasts. Not every pregnant woman gets stretch marks, but they are very common. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be a way to prevent them completely. It's a good idea to keep an eye on your weight and make sure you don't gain more than your doctor recommends. Some manufacturers of lotions and oils claim these products can prevent stretch marks, but this hasn't been proven. However, keeping your skin well moisturized can help cut down on itchiness. Stretch marks should fade and become less noticeable after pregnancy.

What other skin changes can I expect?

Not all pregnant women experience skin changes, but some common changes are listed below.

- Dry, itchy skin, especially on the belly
- Increased sensitivity to the sun. This means you might burn more easily, and may need to wear more sunscreen than usual.
- A dark line (the "linea nigra") down the middle of your belly from your navel to your pubic hair
- Patches of darkened skin on the face (sometimes called the "mask of pregnancy")
- Reddened, itching palms

Some of these skin changes may fade after pregnancy.

Will my interest in sex come back?

If you had morning sickness, mood swings and low energy during the first trimester, you may not have felt like having sex very often. Many women find that their desire for sex returns during the second trimester. Having sex is OK anytime during pregnancy, unless your doctor says you shouldn't.

Other second-trimester changes

Leg pain. You may have leg cramps, especially when you sleep. These may be related to the pressure your growing baby exerts on the nerves and blood vessels that go to your legs. It may help to sleep on your side instead of your back. Another leg condition, deep vein thrombosis (DVT), can be serious. DVT is a blood clot that forms in a vein, causing pain and swelling in one leg. Contact your doctor right away if you have these symptoms.

Puffiness. Your ankles, hands and face may swell during the second trimester. This is caused by fluid retention and slowed blood circulation.

Aching back, pelvis and hips. The job of supporting your growing belly may strain your back. Your hips and pelvic area may begin to ache as pregnancy hormones relax the ligaments (tough, ropelike bands of tissue) that hold bones together. The bones will begin moving in preparation for childbirth.

Abdominal pain. The muscles and ligaments supporting the uterus will stretch and may hurt as your baby grows.

Loose teeth. Pregnancy hormones also affect the ligaments and bones in your mouth, so teeth may loosen. This will go away after pregnancy. However, if you have periodontitis, inflammation or low-grade infection of the gums and tissues around the teeth, seek treatment. Periodontal disease has been associated with preterm (early) birth and low birth weight. The second trimester is a good time to have dental work done.

Nasal congestion, nosebleeds and bleeding gums. These result from increased blood flow to the mucous membranes in the nose and mouth.

Heartburn. This burning feeling in the esophagus (the tube between the mouth and stomach) may begin or get worse in the second trimester. Your expanding uterus may press on your stomach and force food and acid up into your esophagus, causing the burn.

Urinary tract infections. You may develop an infection because hormonal changes slow the flow of urine and the growing uterus pushes on the bladder. Urinary tract infections can lead to preterm labor, so let your doctor know if you feel a burning sensation when you urinate, have to urinate more often, or notice blood or a strong odor in your urine.

Braxton Hicks contractions. Also called "false labor," Braxton Hicks contractions are a tightening of your uterine muscles. It's one of the ways the uterus prepares for labor and delivery. When you're having a Braxton Hicks contraction, your belly will feel very tight and hard, and you may or may not have pain. The contraction should go away within a few minutes and should not come back in any regular pattern.

If contractions become regular and painful and don't go away when you change your position or walk around, call your doctor. It might be preterm labor.