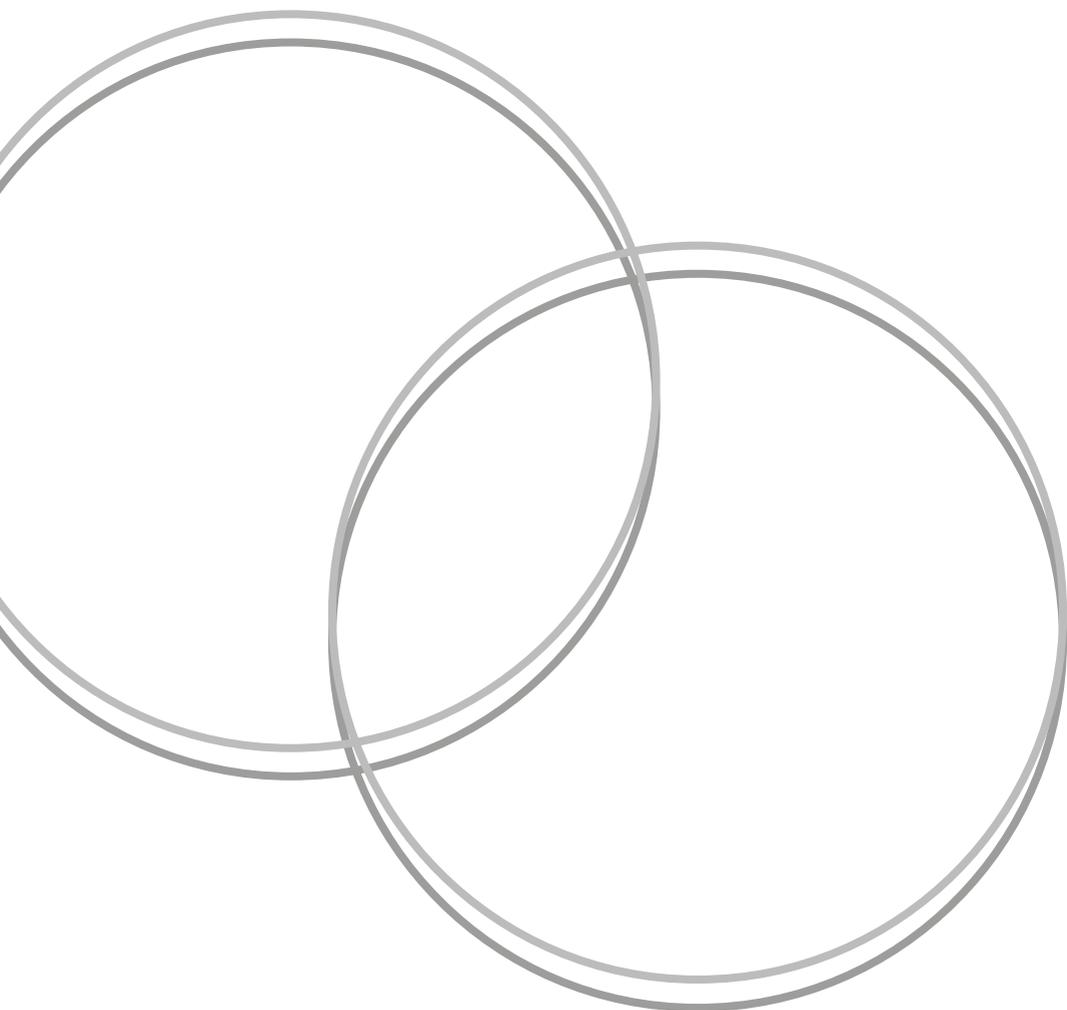




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Nausea and vomiting in pregnancy

Information for parents-to-be



This information sheet has been given to you to help answer some of the questions you may have about morning sickness during your pregnancy. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the nurse or midwife who is caring for you.

## **What is morning sickness?**

Morning sickness is the nausea and vomiting that some women have when they are pregnant. The exact cause is unknown, but it is probably linked to the hormone changes that occur naturally when you are pregnant. Very rarely, vomiting can be so severe that it leads to dehydration (excessive loss of water and salts from the body) and serious weight loss. This is known as hyperemesis gravidarum.

## **What are the symptoms and how long do they last?**

Morning sickness has a range of symptoms that can be mild or severe. These may include nausea, vomiting, tiredness, headaches, lightheadedness and weight loss. Most symptoms start around six weeks after your last period and stop by the 14th week of pregnancy. A small number of women find that these symptoms continue beyond this time and rarely it may last for the whole pregnancy.

## **Will morning sickness hurt my baby?**

Morning sickness should not hurt your baby and is often considered a sign of a healthy developing pregnancy. However, morning sickness that progresses to hyperemesis gravidarum can become more of a problem. If you are unable to keep any foods or fluids down and/or begin to lose a lot of weight, you must contact your GP.

## **Will I need any tests if I think I have hyperemesis gravidarum?**

Your GP will refer you to the Urgent Gynaecology Clinic or Gynaecology Ward. When you arrive we will ask you for a urine sample which will be tested for ketones. These are an acid which is produced when your body starts to burn it's own fat, which can be a sign that your body is not getting enough nutrition from the food you eat.

We might also take blood tests to check how well your kidneys and liver are functioning. These organs can be affected in severe cases of hyperemesis gravidarum.

## **What treatments are available?**

Depending on how bad your symptoms are and the test results, you may be given:

- dietary advice
- anti-sickness tablets to take home
- anti-sickness medication by injection
- intravenous fluids (fluids that are given directly into your vein).

In extreme cases you may need to stay on the Gynaecology Ward overnight, so we can monitor you and treat or prevent you from becoming dehydrated.

## **What happens if I do not get treatment?**

If you do not get treatment your condition may get better on its own, if the symptoms are mild. However, if the vomiting does not improve or stop and you are not able to eat or drink anything, it is important that you get medical advice so that you do not become dehydrated.

## **Is there anything I can do that may help to relieve morning sickness?**

- Eat small meals throughout the day, so that you are never too hungry or too full.
- Avoid rich, fatty or spicy foods.
- Avoid foods with smells that bother you.
- Eat more carbohydrates (such as plain baked potatoes, white rice, dry toast).
- Keep a light snack such as a savoury biscuit or cracker by your bed, and eat it before getting up in the morning or if you wake in the night, to help prevent sickness in the morning.
- Avoid brushing your teeth immediately after eating.
- Have lots to drink, drinking small amounts often throughout the day, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Get plenty of fresh air.
- Try to relax and avoid stress.
- If you are producing too much saliva, suck or sip fresh lemon or lime juice.
- There is some evidence that ginger relieves sickness in some people. Try using root ginger in your food or eating candied ginger, taking ginger capsules or drinking ginger tea made with dried or fresh ginger. Ginger ale, cordial or ginger biscuits may also help. However, you must avoid ginger if you are taking any prescribed medications, particularly blood thinning drugs including aspirin, or tablets for high blood pressure.
- Complimentary therapies such as acupuncture, acupressure or hypnotherapy may also help.
- Vitamin B6 may be helpful if you have early morning sickness. Speak to your midwife or GP to find out how much you should take.

# **Where can I get more information?**

## **Pregnancy Sickness Support**

Website: [www.pregnancysicknesssupport.org.uk/](http://www.pregnancysicknesssupport.org.uk/)

Tel: **02476 382 020**





## Further information

Please speak to the department where you are being seen if you would like an interpreter. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter. Please also ask them if you would like this information leaflet in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronically
- in another language.

We have tried to make this information meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They will be happy to help.

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