

# Treating Minor Illnesses During Pregnancy

There are a number of common illnesses you may experience while pregnant. This sheet offers some helpful suggestions for dealing with the aches and pains associated with colds, allergies, headaches, and some digestive problems. Certainly, we want you to call our office if these measures have not been helpful, or if you feel that a medication not listed here is indicated. The medications listed below appear to be safe in pregnancy. It is important to stress that there are a variety of steps to take in treating illnesses, many of which recommend changing behavior or dietary habits, rather than going directly to medications.

## Headaches, Muscle Strains And Fever

**Headaches and Fever:** Unfortunately, headaches are very common in pregnancy. Lying down in a quiet, dark place, using an ice pack and making time to rest are helpful for headaches. TYLENOL (2 regular or extra-strength tablets as directed) appears to be the safest of the pain medications and fever reducers in pregnancy. **\*\*Talk with your doctor if you are using Tylenol every day for headaches, since there are other safe medications that he or she may prescribe.**

**Muscle Strains:** Alternating a heating pad with ice packs and resting the affected area will speed up recovery from muscle strains. TYLENOL is also helpful as well. Be sure to use proper body mechanics when lifting, bending and stretching to eliminate sources of muscle strains.

**Fever:** TYLENOL is always recommended for significant fever. If your temperature is greater than 101°F, please call the office for instructions—make sure you have a working thermometer!

## The Common Cold

Most people, pregnant or not, will get sick with a cold about once a year. Symptoms tend to last a little longer in pregnant women, so being patient is an important part of the treatment. The very best medicine for a cold is REST and FLUIDS (mostly water—about 8 glasses per day). Be sure you have a thermometer, and call the office if you're not getting better.

**Runny nose:** In the early part of a cold, BENADRYL, ALAVERT, XYZAL, ZYRTEC, or CLARITIN can be very helpful for a runny nose that is clear and watery. Don't use more than one of these medicines at a time!

**Congestion:** If you're experiencing a stuffy nose, steamy showers twice a day, combined with increased fluid intake will help break up nasal congestion—try using a NETTY POT also—it really helps. Decongestants like SUDAFED or ACTIFED can improve congestion as well, but **we do not recommend using these medications in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy or at any point if you have high blood pressure.** AFRIN NASAL SPRAY (as directed) is immediately effective for nasal congestion, but should not be used more than 1-2 times per day, and for no more than 2 consecutive days, or it will actually worsen the symptoms it was used for in the first place!



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**Sore throats:** CHLORASEPTIC, CEPACOL, and SUCRETS are anesthetic sprays and lozenges that can be very soothing for sore throat pain. TYLENOL is also effective for severe sore throat pain.

**Coughs:** This is often the symptom of a cold that lasts the longest. Again, **pushing fluids is very important**, and standing in a steamy shower will help to loosen thick secretions. ROBITUSSIN DM or MUCINEX as directed are safe to use and will thin bronchial secretions and make a dry cough more productive.

## Heartburn

This is a common problem in pregnancy—usually due to the high levels of progesterone your body is now producing. Also in late pregnancy, the enlarging uterus is pressing upward on the stomach and pushes acids back up into the esophagus. Several easy tips that really will help are:

- “Graze” on small, frequent meals instead of large overly filling ones. Avoid spicy, fatty and greasy foods. Dry crackers to snack on may neutralize the acid somewhat.
- Carry TUMS, MYLANTA, RIOPAN or MAALOX with you and use it as directed. Be careful—overusing some of these medications can cause diarrhea!
- To avoid acid reflux, **do not** eat before bedtime. Also, go to bed with your head elevated on several pillows, or try sleeping in a recliner chair.
- If heartburn becomes intolerable, you can try ZANTAC-75 or PEPCID-AC as directed.

## Diarrhea

Diarrhea is best treated conservatively, since it is usually a self-limiting minor illness. Pushing water-based fluids, eliminating dairy products for a day or two, eating very bland foods (noodles, clear soups, bananas, rice and toast) and resting are recommended first. IMODIUM is a safe medication that can be used. If diarrhea is bloody, is accompanied by temperature >101°F, or is causing severe abdominal pain, you should call your provider right away.

## Constipation

This common problem is definitely best managed by changing dietary habits first! If you tend to have difficulty with constipation, you need to make a special point in pregnancy to include lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, accompanied by other good sources of fiber and lots and lots of water every day. These measures are critical to preventing constipation. Regular exercise is important as well, as is going to the bathroom as soon as you have the urge to go. In addition, METAMUCIL, CITRUCEL, FIBERCON (always with lots of water) are excellent sources of fiber, and COLACE is a stool-softener that can be taken 1-2 times daily. SENEKOT and MILK OF MAGNESIA are gentle laxatives that can be used occasionally if constipation becomes severe.

## Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are swollen and painful blood vessels in the anal area, and are often aggravated by chronic constipation and pregnancy. Using the dietary recommendations in the above section, and getting off your feet and lying down as often as possible is the best treatment for hemorrhoids. Soaking in a warm bath several times a day, applying ice packs and avoiding straining during bowel movements are very important. In addition, PREPARATION-H, ANUSOL, and TUCKS pads can be helpful.



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## Vaginal Yeast Infections

Symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection are itching and a thick yellow-white discharge. Cotton underwear and avoiding restrictive clothing are helpful in preventing yeast infections. Treatment is safe for both you and the baby, and includes MONISTAT, GYNELOTRIMIN, and MYCELEX creams or suppositories. There are 3- and 7-day treatment options you can buy. The 1-day treatments are not recommended, and in fact, can be irritating. Douching is NOT recommended in pregnancy. If yeast is not improved by the above medications, there are other medications that your provider can prescribe.

Some medications not described above can also be used safely in pregnancy when prescribed by your provider. As a safety precaution for both you and your baby, always call the office first if you believe a medication not listed above will be helpful to you.

## Medications To Avoid During Pregnancy

Here are a few commonly used medications that are generally NOT SAFE IN PREGNANCY:

**ASPIRIN or ADVIL • TRANQUILIZERS • PRIMATINE MIST  
MOTRIN, NUPRIN, ALEVE • DIET or SLEEPING PILLS • IMITREX  
PEPTO BISMOL • KAOPECTATE • DOUCHE PRODUCTS**