

ummy massage

Mummy tips on how to naturally treat common discomforts of the three trimesters

None of the tips below are a replacement for medical advice. Please do consult your GP or Midwife if you are suffering with any of the ailments below.

I've categorised the discomforts into trimesters but as I found during my own pregnancy, it doesn't always work that way!

1st trimester

Morning Sickness

Some lucky women just don't suffer with any morning sickness (I was not that lucky!) but generally speaking, most women to begin to feel better at the beginning of the second trimester as the hormones levels begin to stabilise. If you have severe or long term nausea, consult your Doctor or Midwife in order to avoid dehydration.

Morning sickness is caused by the rapid change in hormonal levels that occurs during the first weeks of pregnancy, often resulting in nausea. Other causes can include strong smells and certain foods so avoid these if you can.

Dietary:

Eating little and often can help with morning sickness. I used to keep a banana (also great for cramps) and dry crackers next to my bed as I found I felt sick first thing in the morning (low blood sugar in the morning can cause morning sickness).

You can buy lozenges specifically for morning sickness which contain lemon, sour apple and vitamin B6. I struggled to find them when I was pregnant but I know that you can buy them online.

Drinking Ginger Tea is widely used and you can make your own. I have a juicer at home and juiced a piece of ginger which I then kept in a jar in the fridge (add a little of the ginger juice to a mug of hot water to make a herbal tea). You can also boil slices of ginger in water or simply buy good ginger tea from a health shop (read the label to check the quantity of ginger as some may contain very little). ***Be careful not consume too much ginger.*** If you find the taste of ginger overbearing, you can try adding a little honey to taste.

Some women find that sucking on ice or eating ice lollies can reduce the feeling of sickness.

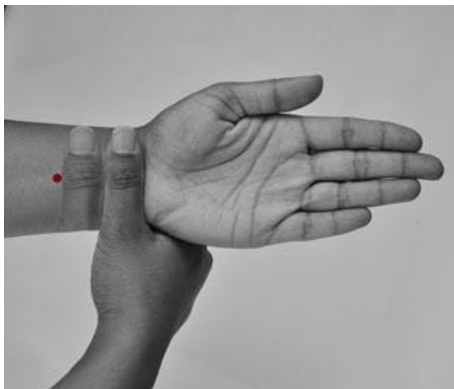
Drink water 15-20 minutes after your meal as drinking liquids with your meal can cause havoc with your already sensitive stomach acids

Acupressure:

You can buy motion sickness bands from chemists which actually sit on and stimulate the great acupressure point for nausea called 'Inner Pass'. Alternatively you can locate and stimulate the point yourself.

The first picture shows you that the point is two thumb breadths (use the thumb knuckle as your measure) from the wrist crease. This gives you the distance. The second picture shows you that the point is in between two tendons (please note that your tendons may run more straight or angled than those in the picture each as everybody's anatomy is different). If you gently run your finger up your arm, you can feel the tendons.

To begin with, gently massage the point in circular motions whilst pushing down with a little pressure. Don't push too hard straight away as this can occasionally make the nausea worse. If you feel comfortable, you can begin to apply more pressure. Continue for 1-2 minutes and repeat as required on both wrists.



Other tips:

Many find that the smell of lemon can alleviate symptoms. You can buy lemon candles or simply squeeze some lemon in warm water and sniff.

Make sure you get plenty of fresh air, you will feel better for it but do avoid any triggers that make you feel unwell (if fried food makes you feel sick, take a route where you don't have to pass any fast food shops).

2nd trimester

Heartburn / Acid Reflux

The lower oesophageal sphincter (LES) is a muscle between the oesophagus and stomach which relaxes to allow food to pass from the oesophagus and into the stomach. At all other times, it remains closed to stop stomach acid from backing up into the oesophagus and throat. During pregnancy, hormones can soften the LES, which along with the extra pressure on your stomach due to body changes and the growth of your baby is what causes heartburn and acid reflux.

Dietary:

You've probably heard this a few times before but do try and eat little and often. As your baby grows you may find yourself doing this naturally for your own comfort!

There are many old and traditional remedies around but one in particular is thought to offer instant relief! I must admit that during the 2nd trimester I really suffered with heart burn and a yoga instructor recommended I try Apple Cider Vinegar. It's not the nicest tasting thing but I was amazed at how quickly it eased my discomfort. It's thought that it works by stimulating saliva which aids digestion and helps reduce heartburn.

Ideally you need Organic and unpreserved Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV) which you can purchase from a health food shop. After a meal mix two tablespoons of the vinegar with half a glass of water and drink. To make it a little easier to drink, you can add honey to taste. You can also pop a little of the mixture into a small bottle and take it out with you so you don't have to suffer following a meal out with family or friends.

If you really can't stand the ACV you can try taking 1-2 teaspoons of Organic Unprocessed Honey or Manuka Honey before a meal. It works by coating the oesophagus which protects it from the rising stomach acids.

Things to avoid:

Try to avoid lying down too soon after eating as the lower oesophageal sphincter (LES) tends to relax after eating and when you lie down with a full stomach, the contents can press harder against the LES causing reflux and heartburn. If you do need to sleep fairly soon after a meal (we all know how tiring pregnancy can be), prop yourself up with a few pillows.

There are certain foods that are thought to trigger reflux and should be avoided if possible such as:

- Spicy foods
- Fatty foods
- Onions
- Citrus fruits
- Tomatoes
- Chocolate (so unfair, I know!)
- Fizzy drinks

Please do speak with your GP or Midwife for a more comprehensive list of foods to avoid.

Constipation

The increase in hormones generally slows down intestinal movements. The outside of the bowel is a muscle and the hormones cause muscles to relax which means that the bowel struggles to move food and bodily waste along. Try to eat as much fruit and vegetables as you can and drink plenty of water to avoid suffering with constipation.

Easier said than done but try not to strain as this can lead to Haemorrhoids (also known as piles) causing even more discomfort. You can encourage the bowel movement by placing a stool (or something of a similar height such as a small waste bin) under your feet so that your knees are slightly higher than hip height when you go to the toilet. Take a deep breath in and then back out as you gently push (remember, no straining!).

Make sure you go the toilet whenever you feel the urge; don't put it off as this will only cause discomfort later.

Dietary:

Dandelion root tea is thought to increase digestion and promote bile to relieve constipation (please note that Dandelion tea is also a natural diuretic but because of its high potassium content, it does not deplete the body of this important mineral).

If you can't get hold of Dandelion tea you could try eating 1 tablespoon of whole linseed every day. You can sprinkle it on your cereal, or chew it and then wash it down with a glass of water.

Drink plenty of water (lack of water liquid can make the faeces hard and difficult to pass) and try incorporating foods that can lubricate the intestines such as bananas, carrots, honey, cauliflower, spinach and apples.

Foods such as dried prunes, figs, asparagus, bran, wholegrain cereals, and pulses such as lentils, artichokes, cabbage and peas can help to promote bowel movement. There is an added bonus of dried fruits such as prunes also being rich in Iron.

Exercise:

Gentle exercise such as pregnancy yoga, aqua aerobics, swimming or walking can all help to stimulate the bowel and give you a general feeling of well being.

Massage:

Gently massage your abdomen in a clockwise direction to encourage movement. You can do this over your clothes wherever you are (the movement and warmth will also be comforting for your baby). You could build this into your daily morning routine and moisturise your abdomen gently with the added bonus of softening your skin ready for more stretching as your baby grows!

Acupressure:

The most commonly used acupressure point for constipation is known as 'Branch Ditch'. To locate, place 3 fingers at the bottom of your hand as shown in the first picture. This gives you the distance of the point. The second picture is showing that the point is just about in the middle of the arm (between the two forearm bones) but slightly more towards the thumb side.

Massage this point in circular motions using moderate pressure for 1-2 minutes once a day, for a few days.



Haemorrhoids/Piles

Piles during pregnancy can be painful at the best of times and incredibly uncomfortable during pregnancy. Your body has more blood circulating around it during pregnancy which makes all your veins a little more dilated. Unfortunately that means that the delicate veins around your bottom may get sluggish and swollen too (especially when your ever-growing uterus is putting extra pressure on them).

The most common cause is straining due to constipation so do ensure that you eat plenty of fibrous and lubricating foods as well as drinking plenty of water. Make sure you go the toilet whenever you feel the urge; don't put it off as this will only cause discomfort later.

Speak to your Midwife or GP who should be able to recommend a suitable cream that you can purchase from a chemist.

Exercise:

Try gentle exercise to get circulation moving such as pregnancy yoga, aqua aerobics, swimming and walking.

Other tips:

Try adding three tablespoons of salt and one tablespoon of bicarbonate of soda to a warm bath (just deep enough so that when you sit in the bath, it covers your bottom and hips). If you need to, you can repeat three times a day or after each bowel movement as it will help to dilate the veins allowing more blood flow to the area. *Special care must be taken when getting up and out from the bath*, as the increase in blood circulation can cause a little dizziness.

If there is much pain, you can alternate the warm water with an ice pack (a few ice cubes wrapped in some kitchen towel), keeping the ice pack on for up to 20 minutes. Your cheeks may go numb but I guess numbness beats pain! Please note that if you do try this, you will need to sit in the warm water first to allow the veins to dilate and relax. You can then use the ice pack and continue to alternate.

- Avoid perfumed soaps and gels
- Always dry the area well after a bowel movement, shower or bath
- Wear comfortable cotton underwear to allow your skin to breathe
- Avoid too much sitting or standing if possible

Leg Cramps

Cramps during pregnancy can be very uncomfortable, especially if they wake you up out of your much needed sleep! It is thought that the increased weight of carrying your baby can be the cause along with the pregnancy hormones affecting the muscle tone in your legs.

Dietary:

It is also possible that as your baby takes what he or she needs from your body's supply, you can be left short of nutrients and salts such as magnesium, calcium and/or vitamin C. I found that a Banana and a yogurt along with a little gentle stretching really helped keep my cramps at bay.

Try and incorporate some of the following foods into your daily diet:

Calcium rich foods:	Magnesium rich foods:	Vitamin C rich foods:
Dairy produce	Bananas	Watercress
Green leafy vegetables	Dates & Figs	Leafy greens
Sunflower seeds	Sweetcorn	Potatoes
Salmon	Green vegetables	Tomatoes*
Dried Beans & Pulses	Apples	Citrus fruits*

**please avoid if you are suffering with heartburn /reflux*

Chamomile tea contains Glycine which is thought to relax the muscles and calm the nervous system. For best results, replace your tea intake with chamomile tea and drink 5-6 cups per day (this will also help you keep hydrated).

You can also try a natural salt called Quinine which can be found in Tonic Water (do not take Quinine tablets without consulting your Doctor). Drink 1 glass of Tonic Water before you go to bed.

Make sure you drink plenty of water as dehydration can cause cramps.

Exercise /Stretching:

If you're woken by a cramp, stretch the muscle straight away. Straighten your leg, heel first, and gently flex your ankles and toes. It might hurt at first, but the pain will gradually go away. You can also relax the cramp by very gently massaging the muscle. If this doesn't work, you may have to get out of bed and walk around for a few minutes.

Daily calf stretches - stand a metre from a wall and place your palms flat on the wall. Keep the soles of your feet flat on the floor and hold for five seconds. Repeat the exercise for five minutes, three times a day, especially before going to bed.

Whilst watching TV, circle your ankles in one direction and then in the opposite direction.

Make sure you always stretch gently. During pregnancy the ligaments are relaxed due to hormonal changes and it is therefore possible to injure yourself by stretching muscles beyond their 'normal' capability

Other tips:

A warm bath before bed can help to relax muscles and for added relief you can add half a cup of Epsom Salt (the magnesium in the Epsom salts promotes muscle relaxation).

If your muscle pain is constant and not just an occasional cramp, or if you notice swelling or tenderness in your leg, seek emergency medical treatment (in other words get to the hospital straight away). In rare cases a pregnant woman can develop a blood clot which lodges in the leg vein.

- Try and get plenty of rest to avoid being over tired
- Never sit with your legs crossed
- Avoid standing or sitting for prolonged periods of time
- Place a hot water bottle (wrapped in a towel so as not to burn your skin) on the area or if you don't have time to do that, ask somebody to grab you a tea towel soaked and in warm water and then wrung which you can use as compress to apply to the affected area

3rd trimester

Lower backache

Lower back pain is most likely to be caused by your growing baby and hormonal changes. As your centre of gravity shifts and your uterus stretches, your abdominal muscles weaken which changes your posture and puts a strain on your lower back.

Exercise/Stretching:

During pregnancy your coccyx (your tail bone) is constantly sticking out as the weight of your bump forces your back to arch more. Getting on all fours and arching your back into the shape of a sad face (cat stretch) can feel really good but don't stretch the other way into a happy face. So arch flex and arch the spine and hold for however long feels comfortable and repeat as many times as you need to.

Gentle exercise can help with stiffness. Try pregnancy yoga or swimming.

Sitting on a Swiss ball can be really comfortable when you have lower backache due to the firm but soft support provided by the ball. It can also help relieve a build of pressure on the joints. I used to watch TV whilst sitting on mine and sometimes bounce gently!

Massage:

To compensate for the extra weight of your growing baby, you can find that you also suffer with Gluteal pain (pain in the buttock muscles!). If you purchase a tennis ball (they don't cost much and you can get them in most sports shops), place the ball between your bottom muscle and a wall. Start wiggling slowly around to move the ball. You will know exactly what to do once you try doing just that!

Massage can offer great relief but please contact a qualified therapist as there are acupuncture/acupressure points in the lower back that must be avoided as they can be used to induce labour

Other tips:

- Avoid bending and if you do, use your knees (having said that, by now you probably have no choice but to use your knees as your bump is so big!)
- Avoid lifting things
- Don't carry heavy bags, do your grocery shopping online instead
- Try not to sit or stand for long periods of time
- Avoid crossing your legs
- Carry a small rucksack rather than a handbag (I found this really helped balance the weight of my bump out)
- Soak in a warm bath or take a shower
- Use a towel soaked in warm water and wrung out, place on your lower back
- Sleep with a pillow between your knees and maybe even between your feet. I invested in a pregnancy support pillow which I still use now. You could try pushing your bed against a wall, lay on your side with a pillow flat between your back and the wall. The extra support will allow you to relax your hips while you are trying to get to sleep.

Rib pain

Rib pain during pregnancy is quite common as the baby grows and the ribs become compressed. Sometimes you can even feel a little push or a kick from the baby in the lower ribs!

Exercise/ Stretching:

Pregnancy yoga can be really beneficial. Speak to your local Midwifery drop in centre or Midwife who should be able to recommend some classes to you.

Hold your arms over your head to stretch and expand your rib cage.

Other tips:

- Make sure you wear a comfortable unwired bra
- Be aware of your posture and sit up straight as slouching can aggravate pain
- Some women swear by placing ice on the painful area (make sure there is something between your skin and the ice, perhaps a tea towel)

Symphysis Pubis Dysfunction (SPD)

SPD can be caused by a combination of postural changes and pregnancy hormones which cause ligaments to relax and change your centre of gravity. The degree of pain and discomfort can really vary from woman to woman and can come on suddenly at any point during the pregnancy (for me it was the first and third trimester). A sudden movement such as opening the legs too quickly or widely can strain the joint. I used to feel and sometimes hear the joint moving and clicking whenever I climbed the stairs or turned over in my bed at night.

You can buy belts online specifically for pelvic pain during pregnancy which gently compresses the joint together to alleviate pain. This can also help to support your lower back and take some of the strain off of the joints from the weight of your bump. If you have pair of cycling shorts that still fit (or maybe you could pinch your partners), you can wear them at night. Make sure that the waist band sits under and not on your bump.

If you can feel a specific point in the region where it hurts to touch, you can gently massage this by placing a finger on the point and gently rotating.

Other tips:

- When getting into bed sit on the edge and keep your knees close together, lie down on your side, lifting both legs at the same time. Reverse this to get up
- Try not to attempt to pull yourself up from lying on your back
- Keep knees together when rolling over in bed
- Sleep with a pillow between the legs and maybe even between your feet
- Avoid non essential weight bearing exercises
- Try to utilise your abdominal core muscles with any activity
- When getting into a car, sit down first and then swing legs keeping them together
- Avoid sofas and chairs that are too low or too soft
- Avoid any movement with your knees apart
- Take smaller steps when walking

- Avoid stairs if possible but if you do use them, place one foot on the step, then the other before you move onto the next step (basically you are trying to minimise placing all of your weight on one leg)
- Move within the limits of pain in order not to aggravate further
- Avoid twisting, bending, straddling or squatting

Many women find floating in a heated pool relieves the pain but it is best to discuss this with your Midwife first as you will be lying on your back (not recommended from 30 weeks onwards). I did try a float in the final trimester (with the consent of a midwife) and felt really relaxed and light as the water took the weight of my achy body!

Shortness of breath

Unfortunately shortness of breath is difficult to avoid as the baby grows in the later stages of pregnancy. Your expanding uterus puts pressure on your diaphragm and this pressure prevents your lungs from fully expanding causing shortness of breath.

Exercise/Stretching:

There are many yoga poses that help to open the chest and can help to increase lung capacity. For best results, speak to your local drop Midwifery drop in centre or a Midwife who will be able to recommend some pregnancy yoga classes to you.

You can safely perform poses at home yourself such as a modified Sun Salutation. Stand with your legs as hip width apart. Bring your arms up and reach your hands together toward the ceiling. Palms should be together. Bring your arms back down. Inhale as your arms go up, and exhale as they come down.

You could also try taking a deep breath in, link your fingers behind your back, breath out slowly whilst pushing your shoulders back and lifting your head to look towards the ceiling. This positing will help to open the chest.

The good news is that as your baby prepares for birth and drops down to engage, the shortness of breath will disappear!

Other tips:

- Use good posture and sit up straight to help the lungs to expand
- Avoid prolonged standing as this can cause dizziness and leave you feeling short of breath
- Use extra pillows to elevate yourself when sleeping
- Do things a little more slowly and avoid over exerting yourself
- Avoid travelling at busy times and if you are commuting on public transport, sit close to an open window