

mama
mio

Mama you've got this

An honest guide to pregnancy

Melissa Schweiger Kleinman

Foreword

Here at Mama Mio we know pregnancy isn't easy, that's why we teamed up with skincare and pregnancy expert Melissa to offer a little helping hand through what is arguably the most challenging, mind-boggling, exciting, thrilling and incredibly wonderful 9-month s-t-r-e-t-c-h of your life.

After spending over a decade working in the beauty industry as a magazine editor and as a member of the marketing team at Sephora, Melissa Schweiger Kleinman wanted to translate her love for healthy skincare in a way that could help mamas-to-be. When Melissa became pregnant with her first child in 2008, she spent a significant amount of time weeding through beauty products to find only the safest and healthiest choice for this meaningful and exciting new stage in her life. She drew upon her investigative journalism skills and dug deep through studies and research to identify what the most effective products with the lowest toxin profile were for her skin. With a new life growing inside her belly, only the safest products would do. Melissa knew this important information she uncovered had to be shared with other like minded expecting mamas.



Melissa lives in New York with her husband and two sons and continues to research and write about safe skincare. Melissa is also the Director of Communications at Schweiger Dermatology Group in New York City, where she works with some of the best dermatologists in the country to help spread the word about healthy skin in the media.

We hope this guide arms you with the knowledge you need to feel confident in all aspects of your pregnancy. With any luck you'll laugh along the way too.

Remember growing tiny humans is exhausting, yet incredibly rewarding, and you're doing a fantastic job. Mama, you've got this!

The Mama Mio team

NOTE: All content in this guide, including medical opinion and any other health-related information, is for informational purposes only and should not be considered to be a specific diagnosis or treatment plan for any individual situation. Use of this book and the information contained herein does not create a doctor-patient relationship. Always seek the direct advice of your own doctor in connection with any questions or issues you may have regarding your own health or the health of others.

Mama
you've
got
this

You're about to embark on the wildest ride of your life. Your body is going through some miraculous changes and with that your mind is racing to catch up. You may feel like an amateur at this whole baby-creating thing, but your body was made to do this. It's just what we do.

It's completely normal to have some questions. Ok, a lot of questions. But what about those less practical ones? Such as: How to share this whole experience with your best friend who's been unsuccessfully trying to get pregnant?; How to politely tell your mother-in-law to back off?; And which sexual positions can you and your partner try that won't make you feel as if you're about to poke the baby in the head?

Google will only tell you so much, and in some cases, way too much. If what you're looking for is frank answers to some of your more unlikely questions, you've come to the right place. Some answers in this book are a little more scientific, while others are purely based on been-there-done-that experience. What you can be sure of is that all of the answers in this book are free of bullshit and written straight from the heart.

Raising a child may take a village, but having another mama's guidance can certainly help make your pregnancy that much easier too. The next nine months will bring many changes, and armed with a little knowledge and perspective, you can tackle some of the hurdles with confidence. Mama, you've got this!

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Skincare

What happened to the
so-called pregnancy glow?

01

“Top words to live
by during pregnancy:
less is more”

Growing another human inside your body is a scary proposition. Now add into that all of the news about the potential harm your seemingly benign eye cream could be doing and you have a recipe for a nervous breakdown. Yes, it's true that what you put on your skin can get absorbed into your bloodstream. Yes, you should also be mindful of this truth and do what you can to avoid applying the red-flagged no-nos discussed here onto your skin. But rather than scrutinise every ounce of cream you put on, don't freak out. Use your newly found mother's intuition and make wise decisions.

While it's not necessary to do a complete beauty detox and trash all of your products that are not slapped with an organic label, try to cherry-pick the products that make more sense to swap out for cleaner versions. With the products you use every day, such as sun cream, cleanser and moisturiser, it's smart to do the homework on those ingredients and choose brands that offer non-toxic versions of your favourite formulations. Pregnancy is also a good time to tread lightly on your serums, masks and scrubs — basically any beauty products that aren't necessities to your skin's health. Top words to live by during pregnancy: less is more. With a little guidance, you can still make it through the next nine months with your clear and beautiful pre-pregnancy complexion intact.

Can I still have my monthly facials?

Don't you just love a good facial? With the array of super high-tech facials out there that boast lasers, lights, peels and microcurrents, going for a facial has become the next best thing to a facelift. During pregnancy, it's better to stick only to the most basic of facials. This is not the ideal time to start or continue an anti-ageing regime, so you might as well nip your dreams of emerging from the delivery room looking like you just graduated from university in the bud. However, a good facial during pregnancy can help you control the annoying acne breakouts that have landed on your once-clear complexion.

Tell your beautician that you're pregnant at the time you book your appointment so they can plan accordingly. Make sure they're on board and have the proper pregnancy-safe techniques and treatments to be worth your while. You'll want to ensure the products that your facialist plans to use are free and clear of any pregnancy skincare no-nos. Also keep in mind that many dermatologist's offices now offer medical facials. If you feel more comfortable having a medical doctor present at the time of your facial, then find a medi-spa in your area that will see you. While the actual dermatologist most likely won't be the one performing your facial, they will be overseeing the beautician who will be providing you with your treatment.

Bottom line is that a good old-fashioned facial with some basic cleansing, pore cleaning, gentle extracting and moisturising, along with a light facial massage can do wonders for your relaxation and even give your skin a gorgeous pregnancy glow. So go ahead and pamper yourself with a facial, but keep it basic with a capital B while you're cooking a baby in your belly.



*“Keep it
basic with a
capital B”*

Help! I look like a ghost!
Is fake tan still ok to use?



Feeling kind of pasty? You have to be living under a boulder to not know the serious safety hazards of getting a real sun tan (skin cancer, anyone?), not to mention the leathery look that long-term sun worshipping does to your appearance. But if the pale shade your skin has taken on isn't quite doing it for you, a fake tan can sound like the perfect way to bring your mojo back, right? Well, yes and no.

The active ingredient found in most self-tanning lotions is called DHA (dihydroxyacetone), which is a sugar molecule derived from plants. The DHA reacts with the amino acids on the top layer of your skin and in turn stains the skin brown (or, in the case of a poorly made self-tanner, Oompa Loompa orange). DHA has up until recently been thought to only affect the outermost layer of the skin (aka the stratum corneum), which is comprised of mostly dead skin cells.

However, some new information is giving people pause. A pregnant pause you might even say. Reports show that small amounts of DHA can potentially trickle into the blood-stream via topical use¹. Whilst there's no data to clearly support that DHA is harmful, even a trace amount of it in the bloodstream during pregnancy is cause enough for concern not to use it.

So as with everything else in pregnancy, exercising caution is your best bet, but if you've got a special event (i.e. your bestie's beach wedding in Barbados) that calls for a show of your skin and you absolutely need to use self-tanner, the safest way to apply it, especially during pregnancy, is with your own two hands, not with a spray. While DHA may be considered ok for topical use, breathing it in is another story. If inhaled into the lungs, DHA could get absorbed into the bloodstream quicker². Not to mention that when self-tanner is sprayed on, you're possibly getting it into any open cuts on your body. While a spray tan may deliver a seamlessly bronzed look, it's not worth it.

My skin is freaking out. What can I use to help the spots that have cropped up on both my face and body? And can I still treat my acne while I'm pregnant?

Welcome to pregnancy, where hormones rule and your skin thinks it's back in high school. Acne is the top skincare issue during pregnancy and is the number one reason why many mamas-to-be find themselves back at the dermatologist's office. You may be tempted to pick and prod at your new smattering of spots, but put your fingers down and step away from the mirror asap. By performing bathroom surgery, you'll only do more harm than good, and possibly leave scars that will last way beyond your baby's first birthday.

First it's important to know what not to use on your spots during pregnancy. The avoid-while-pregnant list includes salicylic acid, benzoyl peroxide, and vitamin A. These ingredients are widely found in many over the counter skincare products and have been shown to present a possible risk for the baby in your belly. The oral acne drug Accutane (isotretinoin), which is a derivative of vitamin A, is known to cause birth defects and should never be used during pregnancy or when trying to conceive. Thankfully there are several options to safely clear pimples during pregnancy, depending on what type of acne you have.

Some safe methods of removing blackheads and whiteheads include extractions (done at the hands of a beautician or dermatology provider) but for the more inflammatory spots, a trip to the dermatology clinic will yield the best results. You can safely get in-office blue-red light treatments or ask your dermatologist for a pregnancy-safe prescription.

For an over-the-counter remedy, look for acne-fighting products that contain sulphur, lactic acid or tea tree oil to help clear out pores and get rid of your spots. While hormones tend to be at the root of your new acne issues, make sure to change your pillowcases, and rub down your mobile phone with an alcohol swab to avoid getting oils and bacteria on your face. Now is the time to splurge on a good concealer. Once baby arrives you can use that same concealer to cover up the dark circles under your sleep deprived eyes (you can thank me later!).

“Welcome to pregnancy, where hormones rule and your skin thinks it's back in high school”

Why do I have dark patches on my face?

If you look in the mirror each morning hoping to see that illustrious pregnancy glow kick in, you might be a little surprised when instead the face looking back at you has dark patches on it. Don't be alarmed, this is just what's known as the "mask of pregnancy." The medical term for this condition is melasma or chloasma and it's a direct result of all of those lovely hormones coursing through your body.

The pregnancy hormones oestrogen and progesterone, that have so rapidly taken over your body, are reacting with the melanin in your skin, causing it to increase production. Hence the seemingly strange shaped splotches of darkness on your skin. If you've got moles or freckles, those will sometimes darken as well. And just in case your body gets jealous, it too can receive some dark splotchy love in the form of darkened nipples and a long vertical line down your belly. Sometimes, your vulva even gets in on the act and can turn a few shades darker. That's when the party really starts!

So, now what to do if you've got this mask? It helps to know that in most cases, the dark patches will fade after pregnancy, but the best thing you can do to help prevent them in the first place or prevent them from multiplying is to wear broad-spectrum SPF of at least 30 every day. Better yet, keep out of the sun altogether.

When unprotected UV light interacts with the pregnancy hormones in your body, your skin gets blotches of pigment. Genetics play a role in the development of melasma or chloasma, but even so, don't blame your mum for your mask. Rather, wear your SPF along with a wide-brimmed hat to ward off the splotches before they even appear.



Why is SPF so important during pregnancy?

The fact of the matter is that sun protection is extremely important all the time, not just during pregnancy. However, if you're not using a broad-spectrum SPF of at least 30 every single day you step out of the house with exposed skin during pregnancy, well, you're just being foolish! The pregnancy hormones coursing through your body can make your skin become super-sensitive to UV light and cause hyperpigmentation (remember that mask of pregnancy?). Along with the cosmetic benefits of wearing sunscreen, there are more serious health risks that you should be thinking about, such as protecting yourself from skin cancer.

While any skin cancer diagnosis is bad news, the finding of melanoma during pregnancy could potentially be more dangerous than any other time in your life. Women who were diagnosed with melanoma while they were pregnant or within a year after giving birth were at greater risk for the cancer to spread, reoccur, or for it to be fatal³. The reason for this finding isn't clear, but could have something to do with hormones, a weakened immune system during pregnancy, or just the fact that pregnant women and new mums don't have much time to stay on top of their health and let a suspicious looking mole slide.

Before you freak out, know that a case of pregnancy-related melanoma is very rare. But since there are so many changes going on with your skin during pregnancy, it's easy to shrug off an odd looking mole as just another harmless occurrence. In the case of melanoma, catching a suspicious mole early can

make all of the difference in your prognosis. Teach yourself the ABCDE signs of melanoma and keep a close eye on your moles. If you see any of these warning signs, call your dermatologist immediately:

- **Asymmetry:** Draw an imaginary line down the center of your mole, do both halves match? If not, it's asymmetrical and is a warning sign for melanoma.
- **Border:** While the borders of a benign mole are generally smooth and even, irregular borders might indicate melanoma.
- **Colour:** A mix of colours, even various shades of the same colour, on your mole is a warning sign. A mole that's dark and black is also cause for concern.
- **Diameter:** Another possible red flag is if the suspected lesion is greater than 6mm in diameter.
- **Elevation:** Probably the most important warning signal is if a mole changes size or texture, or begins to bleed.

Now is the time to invest in clothing with UV Protection Factor (UPF) as well as wide-brimmed hats. Seek out shade whenever possible and try to avoid the sun during it's peak hours of 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. When it comes to sunscreen formulation, try to stick to physical sunblock as opposed to chemical. Physical sunblock ingredients, titanium dioxide and zinc oxide, sit on the surface of the skin, while chemical ingredients get absorbed into the skin. The rule of thumb is a shot glass amount for the whole body and reapplying every two hours while out in the sun. Stay away from spray sunscreens, as you can never really tell how much is actually ending up on the skin and not in the air. In the end, the best sunscreen is the one that you'll use, so find a formula that you like.

What can I do about varicose veins?

As if acne wasn't troublesome enough, enter varicose veins. Another new addition to your pregnancy beauty repertoire. Even if you've never had those ropy-looking enlarged veins on your legs before, pregnancy is a prime time for them to appear. So why have your legs transformed into your grandma's all of a sudden?

There are a bunch of reasons why pregnancy is the perfect storm for varicose veins. Increased blood volume puts extra pressure on your blood vessels, a higher level of the hormone progesterone in your body can cause the veins to dilate or open, and an enlarged uterus can create a roadblock for blood flow from your legs to your heart.

While the most common area for varicose veins is indeed the legs, you might be in for a surprise down there. During pregnancy, your vulva area is susceptible to varicose veins too, so don't freak out if all of sudden your vagina doesn't look like itself anymore. The varicose veins in this area can be small and barely detectable or large and bulging. They can definitely cause discomfort, especially when sitting down. The good news is there are some ways to help prevent and treat them during pregnancy.

If all else fails, take heart in knowing that your varicose veins are generally harmless (although they don't look too attractive) and will likely disappear within the first year after giving birth, once the extra blood pressure decreases. If not, you can always take yourself off to the dermatologist or your doctor for in-office options, such as sclerotherapy, which involves injecting a solution into the veins to collapse them.

The best preventative measures to take against varicose veins include:

- Wearing compression stockings to stimulate blood flow up your legs and towards the heart. Make sure you buy stockings that specifically say "compression" or "pregnancy-safe."
- Getting daily exercise.
- Keeping your legs elevated.
- Not gaining too much weight.
- Cutting down on your sodium intake in your diet.
- Not crossing your legs whilst sitting.
- Avoid standing or sitting in the same position for too long. If you're sitting at a desk all day long, make sure to take breaks and stretch out your legs.
- Wearing flats or trainers instead of high heels to improve circulation. Might as well start incorporating comfy shoes into your wardrobe now anyway, as pushing a pram in stilettos is not going to happen.
- Sleeping or laying on your left side.

I'm ready to shop for a new pregnancy skincare regime. Should I only be looking for organic products?

The term "organic" has become something of a catch-all phrase to mean "good for you" and "healthy." Frequent use of the word organic by so many skincare brands has diluted its meaning. In addition, just because something is organic doesn't mean it's safer or better for you. Many plants and botanicals can be certified organic, but at the same time may not be advisable during pregnancy. Same with essential oils, which can sometimes trigger allergic reactions on the skin. All of this is why it's much more important to focus on skincare that doesn't contain the known nasties, such as phthalates, parabens, petrolatum, mineral oils, sodium laureth lauryl sulfates, or xenoestrogens rather than hunting down only organic products⁴. Pregnancy is still a good time to reassess your beauty and skincare routine and weed out any products that you feel are unnecessary to you feeling good about yourself. Less is definitely more during pregnancy.

"Pregnancy is a good time to reassess your skincare routine"



What cosmetic treatments should I cut out during pregnancy?

Botox shaming is so 2015. While most women are still not shouting from the rooftops about what they're injecting into their faces, the judgy judgy era has also come to a close. With all of the minimally invasive options available we should feel lucky that there are ways we can keep our turkey waddle, eye bags and angry forehead lines at bay without ever having to go under the knife. That said, there's a time and a place to undertake said treatments and pregnancy is not such a time.

Most cosmetic treatments, including Botox, don't have enough research behind them to deem them safe or not for use during pregnancy, which is why it's not worth it to partake. Best to lay off the neurotoxins for nine months and seek out alternative anti-ageing treatments, such as skincare containing antioxidants and peptides. If you're not already using a skincare product containing vitamin C, pregnancy is a good time to start. Make sure to talk to your doctor before introducing any new skincare into your routine during pregnancy.

While Botox and fillers may be off the table during pregnancy, you can see the dermatologist for other treatments. The few in-office procedures deemed safe while you're expecting include red and blue LED light treatments. Blue light therapy will help to kill bacteria on the skin that could lead to acne, while red light helps reduce inflammation and stimulates collagen and elastin production. LED light therapy is chemical-free, painless and non-invasive.



While I fully believe in maintenance, and nine months is a long time to step away from your tune-ups, the best way to keep your skin from ageing during pregnancy is with vigilant use of sunscreen, rain or shine, summer or winter. After you're finished breast-feeding, you can return to the cosmetic treatments of your choice. It's yummy mummy makeover time!






What skincare ingredients should I avoid?

When you're pregnant, Google becomes your best friend. Anyone with a computer, smart phone or tablet and access to WiFi can uncover all sorts of potential "dangers" in their personal care products. That's both the beauty and danger of the internet. It's easy to fall down a rabbit hole of terrifying information, where nothing but a mound of charcoal and a bottle of purified water sound safe enough to use on your skin anymore. You've got enough to worry about with all of the major life changes happening, the last thing you need are more things to keep you up at night. So when we talk about what skincare ingredients to avoid during pregnancy, you have permission to focus on only the ones that have true cause for concern.

I personally banned parabens along with a few other questionable ingredients from my skincare repertoire during pregnancy, but still used a lot of products that contained ingredients that many watch groups would say were inadvisable. To help make it easier for people to know what beauty ingredients to avoid during pregnancy, the US Food and Drug Administration has pregnancy categories for ingredients and assigns drugs a letter (A, B, C, D and X) based on their safety (see next page for more details).

Mama Mio has taken the guesswork out of product shopping for mamas. All nasties have been tossed out, so shopping for skincare is one less thing to worry about during pregnancy. All of the products do exactly what they say they're going to do and use only the cleanest ingredients. Mama Mio proves it's possible to create effective products without using any of those nasty ingredients, including parabens, phthalates, mineral oils or xenoestrogens.



Categories A and B mean the ingredient has not shown any evidence of posing a risk to mamas. Category C means the risk is not ruled out. Categories D and X mean there is a positive evidence of risk and the drug is not advised during pregnancy. These common skincare ingredients fall under categories C, D and X so should be avoided:

- **Salicylic Acid:** Watch out for this ingredient in acne products as well as some exfoliating products.
- **Benzoyl Peroxide:** Another common acne fighting ingredient. Find spot treatments that contain sulphur instead.
- **Retin-A, retinol and retinyl palmitate:** A very common anti-ageing ingredient - vitamin A. Too much vitamin A in your diet during pregnancy can cause birth defects, so why take a chance and use it on your skin?
- **Hydroquinone:** Found in skin lightening products.
- **Aluminum chloride hexahydrate:** Found in common deodorants and antiperspirants. Pregnancy is the time to switch to a natural alternative, rather than your regular deodorant.

While the below ingredients do not have a pregnancy classification, they should still be avoided:

- **Parabens:** Have much controversy surrounding them and whilst no clear link has been made between birth defects and this class of preservatives, it's still wise to try and avoid it during your pregnancy. Parabens are thought to mimic oestrogen and disrupt hormones, a very scary thought during pregnancy.
- **Triclosan:** Is another ingredient that is thought to disrupt hormones in the body. It's commonly found in soap, so making the switch to more natural soaps during pregnancy is a good thing. A study showed that both parabens and triclosan could disrupt the growth of boys during fetal development and the first years of their lives⁵.

Are skincare acids (AHA BHA, and HAs) safe during pregnancy?

Acids might just be one of the best things to happen to skincare. We're not talking about the mind-bending variety, rather Alpha Hydroxy Acids, Beta Hydroxy Acids and Hyaluronic Acid. While many trendy ingredients are introduced all of the time in the skincare world, these acids are mainstays for a reason.

Hyaluronic Acid (HA), a powerhouse of an anti-ageing and hydrating skincare ingredient, is safe to use during pregnancy (hooray!). It's naturally found in our bodies and is very versatile, so it works well with all skin types, including sensitive and acne-prone. Make sure to incorporate it if you're on an acne regimen, to replenish moisture back into the skin that's most likely being robbed by the harsh acne ingredients. HA is best used in serum form, right after cleansing and before you apply your moisturiser.

Now Alpha Hydroxy Acids (AHAs) and Beta Hydroxy Acids (BHAs) are a bit trickier to navigate during pregnancy. Salicylic acid, which falls under pregnancy category C as mentioned before, is a BHA, so best to avoid it. Glycolic acid, which is an AHA, is considered safe to use in lower concentrations, but you can always use a product containing lactic acid instead. Lactic acid, another AHA, will help refine the pores and generally do the same thing that glycolic acid does, but at a lower strength and with less irritation.

One of the main actions of an AHA is they provide chemical exfoliation. I hate dead skin cells sticking around on my face for no good reason just as much as the next person, however using a potentially harmful chemical to give those dead cells their walking papers is not worth it. Instead, I'm all about manual exfoliation, which is the act of using a washcloth to manually slough off the top layer of skin. I've found muslin cloths to be especially amazing for this purpose. After applying your facial cleanser, dampen a muslin cloth with warm water and press it on the skin before gently rubbing the cleanser off. To be extra cautious, use Mama Mio Gorgeous Glow™ Face Wash, a gentle cleanser with tea tree oil, green tea leaf extract and coconut-derived cleansers to give skin a natural radiance.



Body Care

From swollen ankles to stretch marks, we've got you covered!

*“Your body is capable
of some amazing things”*

Your body is doing some pretty incredible things right now. Besides creating a life, it's also producing some rather strange sights and sounds. Whether you're sweating buckets or have developed some rather interesting new marks on your body, you've probably discovered that pregnancy is full of delightful surprises. Dealing with them can take practice and a little patience.

You might also be wondering how on earth your body is going to get this baby out. Your vagina doesn't look quite big enough and even if it does stretch out, will it ever go back to normal? Pregnancy can also usher in souvenirs, such as achy legs and swollen, painful boobs. Luckily there are ways and means you can help minimise these badges of honour.



My muscles are killing me! Why can't I just relax in a jacuzzi for hours?

I know it sounds tempting to lay in a hot bath for hours and let your achy body relax, but it could be unsafe for your baby to be subjected to hot temperatures for prolonged periods of time. A body temperature of over 101°F / 38°C could present possible harm to your growing baby, particularly during the first trimester.

A hot tub or jacuzzi at a hotel or gym is programmed to a certain temperature, which is typically 104°F / 40°C. In a hot tub of that temperature it would only take your body about 10 - 20 minutes to reach 102°F. Since you're not able to regulate or change the temperature on a communal hot tub, it's best to avoid them altogether.

A warm bath in the privacy of your own home, however, is a different story. By keeping your bath at a temperature that's not too hot and leaving your upper body out of the tub, you should be cutting down the risk of overheating. Also, your home bath will naturally become cooler as you lay in it. But to play it safe, don't let yourself lay in a hot bath for more than 10 - 20 minutes. If you start sweating or become uncomfortably hot, get out straight away.

Will I get stretched out down there?

Your body is capable of some amazing things and the star of the show during pregnancy is your vagina. Somehow, your lady parts manage to stretch out and allow approximately 6 - 9 pounds of baby to come out of it. Will someone please give your vagina an award?

But the question you're probably wondering is, will my vagina reclaim her old look and feel after childbirth? This is hard to say definitively and will depend on some external factors, such as genetics and how proactive you are with getting it back to its normal size.

Evolution has allowed the muscles in the vaginal wall to relax and open up during sex and childbirth. After intercourse, the vagina naturally contracts and tightens again. However, with childbirth this may not be the case. In younger mamas (think 20s and early 30s) with first time births, you're almost guaranteed the vagina will go back to its pre-baby tightness. However, the older you are, the more chance it will remain slightly looser than before. Much of this has to do with the natural progression of age. You see, ageing fatigues the vaginal muscles, as does multiple births. Think about an elastic band: every time you pull at it, it loses some of its shape.

However, if this worries you then you can take some measures to bring your vagina back to its pre-baby size. Regular Kegel exercises are highly recommended by experts to tighten the pelvic floor muscles. Kegel exercises can be done anywhere and anytime. The mechanism for Kegels is basically just squeezing the same muscles you would use to stop yourself from peeing mid-stream for about three seconds. Repeat 10 - 15 times, few times a day. Becoming a mama changes you in many ways and your vagina will be much like its old self eventually, but until then, embrace the change and congratulate it for its amazing feats.

“It’s literally impossible to sneeze without peeing myself”

Vicky, Middlesex

How do I prevent tearing during birth? Does perineal massage actually work?

The word “tearing” and “vagina” in the same sentence is enough to give even the most pain-tolerant mama a chill down her spine. The good news is that if your lady parts do tear, which with first time births is unfortunately very common, the healing period is pretty quick, about a week or two of discomfort, mostly when you’re trying to go number two.

In a perfect scenario, you wouldn’t tear, but there are measures you can take to try and prevent it from happening. The first anti-tear method is through perineal massage, which is the age old practice of birth canal widening (yeah, I know, sounds a bit odd). The perineum refers to the area between your vagina and rectum. Experts say that about six weeks before your due date, start massaging an oil or lubricant at the base of your vagina to help soften the tissue and increase its ability to stretch.

Another way to try and prevent tearing is with the position you’re in during childbirth. Side-lying on the hands and knees or upright squatting are all thought to prevent tearing. Ask your labour team to apply warm compresses to the perineum right before the baby comes to help reduce your chance of tearing. It’s also thought that the more in control you are of the pushing, the less chance there is for you to tear. So if you can slowly push between contractions rather than pushing as hard as possible when your doctor or midwife is counting, you’re not putting as much pressure on your perineum, allowing the vaginal area to slowly stretch. Talk to your doctor about their thoughts on perineal massage and make sure to get the green light from them first.



I understand that my skin needs to stretch, but how can I avoid stretch marks during pregnancy?

There are some pretty amazing stunts going on inside your body during pregnancy, and your skin is bound to show some badges of honour in the form of stretch marks. These unwelcome scars are a natural occurrence that take place when your body is growing so rapidly that your skin is forced to play a game of catch up. During pregnancy, the body is expanding so quickly that the skin never has a chance to properly adjust and as a result, the elastin fibers located right under the skin's surface tear and cause stretch marks. Hormones are also thought to play a role in the formation of stretch marks during pregnancy. Some pregnancy hormones can deprive the skin of some of its collagen, which is essential for keeping the skin stretchy. Less stretch equals a higher likelihood of tearing.

Another stretch mark culprit is the lack of essential vitamins in your body to help support healthy skin. Your baby, smart little thing that it is, knows that it needs vitamins and minerals to develop, so if it's not getting enough through your diet, it'll start stealing the ones stored in your body. Vitamins A, C, E as well as omega fatty acids, help support a healthy skin structure and if your diet is lacking in the proper amount of these nutrients, the baby could be dipping into your reserves. All of this makes it even easier for stretch marks to form.



The two most common areas for stretch marks during pregnancy are the belly and boobs, i.e. the two places that are undergoing the most growth. Other areas that are not impervious to stretch marks are the thighs, upper arms and the bum. The first sign that you're getting a stretch mark is an itchy feeling accompanied by the formation of pink lines. The key is to take care of your skin before you start to feel that itchiness, with regular massage using a super-powered moisturiser.

Top ways to help put a stop to stretch marks:

- It's never too early to start with daily use of a moisturiser on your belly. Your skin could always use some extra nourishment, and by taking care to massage it in, you're improving circulation. If you haven't started yet, make sure you're in a good hydration routine by the time the second trimester rolls around, which is when your belly really starts to grow.
- Focusing on one area at a time, lightly massage your abdomen in a rubbing motion for about 15 minutes with Mama Mio The Tummy Rub™ Oil or The Tummy Rub™ Butter. They contain a hydrating blend of organic avocado, almond, rosehip and olive oils. Make your belly massage a special time to connect with your baby. Not to sound corny, but once you start feeling the baby move around inside of you, it's almost like you're having a conversation with him or her. Sitting on a sofa with a pillow behind your back, use this time to bond with your little one.
- Stretch mark prevention starts with keeping your skin as hydrated as possible to help it maintain its elasticity. Make sure you're drinking enough water, ideally two litres a day, throughout the day to stay internally hydrated.
- Babies steal your nutrients for themselves. Replenish any lost omegas or vitamins in your skin with products that are loaded with them. Mama Mio Tummy Rub™ Butter and Tummy Rub Oil™ are formulated with a nutrient-rich blend of organic oils, including avocado, argan and almond.
- It's all about the butter. Shea butter that is. This ingredient is kind of amazing in that it's truly exceptional at keeping the skin hydrated. Shea butter is naturally concentrated with a host of fatty acids and vitamins, all amazing at nourishing the skin.
- Exercise helps too. As if you needed yet another reason to get to the gym. Exercise can improve circulation in your body, which in turn helps the skin retain its elasticity. Stretching at the gym equals skin that can stretch!

There's no guarantee that you'll be able to avoid stretch marks altogether. If these badges of honour find a place on your skin, help them make a hasty exit with Mama Mio Goodbye Stretch Marks™, which is made with Matrixyl 3000™, a powerful peptide that stimulates collagen and skin repair, as well as fruit and algae extracts. Goodbye Stretch Marks™ works hard to reduce the appearance of stretch marks and is completely safe for use during pregnancy and nursing.

What can I do to ease the aches and pains on my legs?



If you haven't noticed, there's a whole lot more of you to support than usual. The bottom half of your body, your legs and feet, are holding up a lot of extra weight these days and it can certainly take a toll. Not only are you heavier up top, but your growing uterus is putting a lot of pressure on your veins, causing a block in blood flow and resulting in fluid retention in your feet and legs. Your poor legs look and feel like they've been through a lot. It might not only be your legs that are bothering you either. Lower back pain and pelvic aches can also crop up during pregnancy. Generally this happens as your pregnancy progresses and more weight is being placed on all of your parts.

Giving your legs some extra love will help cheer them on so they can carry on with their important duties of getting you where you need to be.

Try these tricks for easing leg pain:

- Soak your feet and legs in an Epsom salt bath. Epsom, which is made up of magnesium and sulfate minerals, helps to naturally ease aches and pains. It's been used as a natural remedy for years.
- Apply Mama Mio Lucky Legs™, a cooling gel that provides immediate relief for sore and achy legs as well as long term comfort. The blend of essential oils and spearmint provides an uplifting relief that lasts for hours. Tingly peppermint provides an instant cooling effect, while lavender calms the muscles and murumuru hydrates. This is one product you'll want in your purse with you at all times to slap on for on-the-go soothing.
- Take sitting breaks if you're standing at work or walking around a lot.
- Give yourself a leg massage, or better yet, ask your partner to rub your feet as a thank you for doing all of the heavy lifting.



Why am I sweating so much? It's not even that hot out!

If you're noticing more armpit stains on your shirts than usual, you can blame those hormones again, up to their old tricks. Thanks to the increase of blood flow along with your metabolism and hormonal surge, your body is feeling hot these days (and not in a sexy kind of way). Sweating is a natural mechanism your body uses to cool itself off, so let it do its job and don't worry too much about it. If you're experiencing other symptoms along with the sweating, such as a fever or faster heartbeat, then report to your doctor immediately.

Other than just running to the closest air conditioner, you might need to bring extra tissues with you at all times to wipe the sweat from your skin. Tossing a bar of deodorant in your bag isn't the worst idea either. Speaking of deodorants, this is a good time to find a more natural brand that you like. I love activated charcoal to absorb wetness as well as citrus and mint essential oils to make my pits smell better. Try cooling down with a cooler shower or wearing layers that you can remove throughout the day.

What are these small itchy bumps on my arms? And how do I treat them?

Does it look like you have goosebumps all of the time? Given that you're probably a lot sweatier than normal, you might think this to be a strange phenomena. Those prickly flesh coloured bumps on your arm are actually not goosebumps, they're a skin condition called Keratosis Pilaris, which is linked to the onset of hormones in pregnancy. Keratosis Pilaris (KP) is sometimes referred to as chicken skin and can be itchy and uncomfortable. KP is a result of excess keratin and dead skin cells building up in the hair follicles.

Your new-found chicken skin can be annoying, but it's not harmful. Regardless, you'll probably want to get rid of it. Make sure you're keeping all areas of your body well hydrated with Mama Mio Megamama Body Lotion to relieve the dryness associated with KP. You can also try manual exfoliation in the shower using a pumice stone. There are chemical exfoliants that can work too, but you need to be careful of certain ingredients during pregnancy (see our Skincare section for more guidance on chemical exfoliants!). Speak to your GP about other safe methods of removing your KP.

I've never had so much wind in my life! I'm afraid of cutting one loose in front of my co-workers. What on earth is going on?

Pregnancy is a time when you're guaranteed to lose all inhibitions. If flashing your privates at the doctor's office every visit hasn't done away with your shy side, then the onset of gassiness is sure to be a real game changer. You, and your partner, have probably noticed the array of sounds coming out of both ends. Your new-found gassiness may even be drawing some questionable glances your way at work or in yoga class. But not to worry, this is a normal process all mamas-to-be have to deal with.

As your pregnancy progresses, the uterus can also put pressure on the abdominal cavity and lead to even slower digestion, meaning more gas! Add in the fact that prenatal vitamins can cause constipation and you've got a recipe for flatulence.

Exercise is shown to help speed up digestion, so getting in about 30 minutes a day can alleviate some of that gassiness. Eat more foods with fibre to ease constipation and keep drinking water to help your system keep moving. Beyond that, get used to excusing yourself from meetings for a quick release, and don't worry about it!





Have I gained too much weight?

While your ideal weight gain during pregnancy should be determined between you and your midwife, there are some guidelines to follow. There's a common misconception that once you become pregnant, you've got the green light to start eating for two. Ideally, you're gaining weight gradually. In the first trimester, the extra weight should be coming from the increased fluids and blood in your body; it's really not until after 13 weeks that your weight gain from eating more really begins. If you feel like you're packing on the weight too quickly, work with your doctor and figure out a method to keep you on track, such as coming in for a weekly weigh-in. Since dieting is not advised during pregnancy, mamas-to-be should stick to a diet full of vegetables, fruit, poultry, fish, and whole grains. Steer clear of foods loaded with sugars or fried foods and unhealthy fats.

*“mamas-to-be should stick
to a healthy, balanced diet”*

My breasts are HUGE! Will they stay this way or will they deflate and leave two saggy boobs in their place?

Your boobs go through a lot during pregnancy. Tender and swollen breasts are one of the first signs you're pregnant, you'll probably feel much like you're PMS-ing throughout your nine months. Pregnancy hormones cause an increased blood flow to the boobs as well as a change in the breast tissue. The result is a pair of boobs you may not recognise anymore. If you always dreamt of having a larger rack, you're in luck! However, for those with an already sizeable chest, it might not be such a welcome change. But before you get too used to them, remember this lovely new pair is only on loan for nine months and will require some extra tending to.

You'll want to invest in a new bra, or three, to accommodate your new cup size. The last thing you want to do is trap the girls in a too-tight bra for nine months. Going braless is not a good idea either, since you'll want some extra support to help give you a nice and lifted shape during pregnancy. The extra support will also help keep you from putting more strain on your back. You may want to steer clear of underwire or anything with too much detail on the breast area. Comfort is key right now. Make sure to buy an exercise bra for support and even a comfy cotton bra to sleep in.

You can expect your new boobs to go from swollen and tender to even more swollen, but filled with milk after pregnancy. It may feel

like your boobs are only feeding instruments whilst you're in the early phases of mamahood, but one day you'll have them back to yourself again. During pregnancy is a great time to start giving your breasts some extra TLC. While genetics play a role in just how saggy your boobs will become as you age, there are measures you can take to help keep them at their perkier, such as:

- Applying sunscreen onto your chest area even when it's not sunny outside. The damaging effects of UV rays can penetrate clothing and break down the collagen and elastin on your décolletage, leading to droopy boobs.
- Continue wearing supportive bras to help your boobs keep their shape.
- Apply a hydrating and firming cream, such as Mama Mio Pregnancy Boob Tube™, to the chest and breast area to help improve the skin's elasticity. Your newly enlarged boobs may be on loan only for a spell, but don't fool yourself into thinking they're not affecting your skin. Your heavier breast size is now pulling down on the skin on your chest and décolletage and compromising its elasticity. Luckily you can help fight the negative effects of gravity by using Pregnancy Boob Tube™, which is loaded with Omegas 3, 6 and 9 to lock in hydration, to help your newly stretched skin retain its elasticity. Also in the mix is cabbage extract to help reduce the swelling and discomfort your new pair is causing you, while CoQ10 helps to fight free radical damage and protect the delicate tissue around your chest. With daily application of Pregnancy Boob Tube™, things will definitely start looking up!

Can I still get manis/pedis while pregnant?

When my nails are groomed and polished, I just feel better. It's amazing what a mood-lifter a manicure can be. Even if you can't see your toes, a pedicure can do a lot to elevate your look—especially if it's sandal season. As long as you take some necessary precautions before setting out to the nail salon, a regular manicure/pedicure session can still be a part of your prego beauty routine.

Start by choosing a five, seven or eight-free nail polish. There are so many on-trend nail polish brands, including some of the big names, that don't use harmful chemicals, so there's no reason not to go the safer route for your nail colour. Three-free, which means free of formaldehyde, toluene, and dibutyl phthalate, used to be the standard in worry-free nail polish, but times have changed and we're now aware of more ingredients to avoid. Five-free means there is no formaldehyde, toluene, DBP, formaldehyde resin, or camphor. Seven-free indicates there is no formaldehyde, toluene, DBP, formaldehyde resin, camphor, xylene, or parabens. The next step up is the eight-free formula, which is made without formaldehyde, toluene, DBP, formaldehyde resin, camphor, xylene, ethyl tosylamide, and triphenyl phosphate. At the top of the worry-free nail polish chain is the nine-free polish

which has no formaldehyde, toluene, DBP, formaldehyde resin, camphor, xylene, ethyl tosylamide, parabens, or acetone in its formula. Or for the ultimate non-toxic manicure, look for water-based nail polish, which uses a water-base as opposed to a solvent-base. The only downside with water-based, besides the lack of available brands producing this type, is that it takes a lot longer for the polish to dry. Something to think about before applying it and then having to head to the bathroom for a wee straight away.

Whilst at the salon, ask your manicurist not to clip your hang nails and instead have them pushed back. Cutting your cuticles can lead to possible cuts and become an entry point for bacteria. Find a cuticle oil and rub it on your fingers to help soften that area. Bring your own tools to the salon. Even though tools are supposed to be sanitized before each use, you can never be too safe in this department. Make sure they wash out the pedicure sink with disinfectant before you get your pedicure. If you can try and get to the salon earlier before the crowds, there will be fewer people getting their nails done and fewer chemicals to breathe in. If you can sit near an open door or window whilst getting your manicure, even better.

Can I still get massages during pregnancy?

The short answer is yes, you can still get massages during your pregnancy. Massage is often looked at as a luxurious spa treatment, but it can be particularly beneficial during pregnancy and may be more than just a pampering splurge for mamas-to-be. A good massage can help ease any aches and pains you're experiencing and can also help decrease your stress levels and may even improve your sleep.

Massage can help decrease depression, as well as anxiety and leg and back pain. If you've ever had a massage, you can relate to that blissed out feeling of nirvana and you don't have to be convinced that a massage can indeed help your state of mind.

You may hear from others to avoid massages during the first trimester which is when you're most susceptible to miscarriage. While there is no research linking massage to miscarriage, it's during the first trimester when miscarriages most frequently occur, it's best to always check with your midwife or doctor before booking your massage appointment.

Once you've been cleared for massage, keep these tips in mind:

- Find a masseuse who is specifically trained in prenatal massage, as they'll know the special requirements specific to safe massage during pregnancy.
- When you do go in for your massage be sure the masseuse either places you on a special table, that has a hole in the center for your bump, or they keep you propped up on your left side using a pillow.
- Communicate with the masseuse during your massage and if anything feels uncomfortable, don't be afraid to speak up.

“A good massage can help ease aches and pains”



Hair Care

Tips and tricks to avoid the
dreaded 'mum cut'

“Let’s just say going nine months without high lights wasn’t an option for me”

Hair during pregnancy is a pretty hot topic. I have spent loads of time and money at the salon in my adult life, going from brunette to blonde and back again more than a dozen times. My colourist probably knew more about my relationship status than some of my best friends before I got married. In fact, when I did get married, both my colourist and stylist were invited to my wedding! So when the question of whether or not to dye my hair during pregnancy came up, I did some serious digging to find the safest solution I’d be comfortable with. Let’s just say that going nine months without highlights wasn’t an option for me.

There are also other hair issues to consider during pregnancy, such as WTF is going on with your once semi-lustrous locks? If you thought you had bad hair days before, welcome to pregnancy! Hormones can do some pretty crazy things to your strands. Whether your typically bone straight strands have suddenly turned curly or you’re sprouting hair in places you might not have had it before (hello chin!), there’s no shortage of strangeness to deal with. From finding a worry-free shampoo, to safe alternatives for covering up those greys, here are answers to your most burning pregnancy hair questions.



Can I still get my hair dyed?

I haven't seen my natural hair colour since high school. Luckily for me, I like the ombre look and opt for highlights and balayage as opposed to single process hair dye. With those highlighting methods, the hair dye never touches the scalp, instead it's painted on throughout the hair, with a concentration on the ends, and I was able to continue this process throughout my pregnancy without much worry.

The general rule is that hair dye, while certainly not a natural substance, is thought to be safe enough to use during pregnancy. However, it's best to wait until after the first trimester to head to the salon for your colouring treatment. Your baby is growing their vital organs during the first twelve weeks, so best to leave things alone and embrace your roots for those three months. When you do head back to the salon, opt for highlights, which don't touch the skin, or ask your colourist for an ammonia-free base if you're going to do a single process colour.

Keep in mind that when you're at the salon, you'll want to sit in a well-ventilated area, away from any other chemical treatments that are being done. This is not the time to be shy, speak up and tell your hair colourist that you're pregnant and to place you somewhere near a door or window that you can open. Try and make your hair appointment for earlier on in the day, before the salon starts filling up with chemical smells.



I don't want to go to the salon now. What are some other ways to cover my greys during pregnancy?

If embracing your greys is a foreign concept to you (it is to me!), then just letting them shine bright like a diamond is not going to cut it during pregnancy. Now, I'm not going to lie, the best and most foolproof way to cover your grey hair is with hair colour. As I mentioned, getting highlights that don't touch the scalp is considered very low-risk during pregnancy. That's what I did and I don't regret it, but if you'd still rather take a more natural approach to covering your greys, try these tips:

- Wear a hat. Ok this might sound obvious, but pregnancy is the perfect time to invest in some trendy hats. Wide-brimmed styles will help protect your skin from the sun, while baseball caps can look cute and casual for weekend days.
- Find powder or hair colouring sticks. Tonnes of brands make these now and the formulations are actually much more elegant than prior incarnations.
- Tweeze them out. Before you say 'never' to this one, let me start by debunking the myth that hair grows back thicker and quicker if you pull it out at the root. It doesn't. If you're one of the fortunate ones to have cultivated only a few greys, it's not the worst idea to just pluck them out. Proceed with caution: plucking is not the best practice for your follicles and my own experience has been that when a hair grows back, it can stick straight up, which may be worse than a grey hair that just lies there.

Can I still get chemical hair treatments?

Colouring your hair is pretty similar to getting chemical treatments in terms of pregnancy safety. If you can find a treatment that doesn't touch your scalp, you're most likely going to remain out of harm's way and some may be safer than others. The main chemical treatments at the salon are perms and relaxers, which also include the popular keratin treatments that women with frizzy hair rave about.

The tricky thing about most of these chemical treatments is that there is no definitive evidence to state they're dangerous during pregnancy. Here's what we do know: Keratin treatments (aka Brazilian straightening treatments) have been shown to contain formaldehyde which has been linked to all sorts of nasty things, including cancer. While long-term exposure to formaldehyde is most concerning, we're just not sure what short term exposure might do to us. When the news broke about the potential dangers of keratin treatments, many companies rushed out to create formaldehyde-free versions of keratin. But before you get excited, testing has shown some of those products might contain a chemical called methylene glycol, which when heated with flat irons in the straightening process, turns into formaldehyde.

If you want to play it as safe as possible, why not wait until after your delivery day and plan a post-pregnancy pampering at the salon. Go all out and get your hair straightened or relaxed and your baby can stay safe at home away from the chemicals.

Can I use my regular shampoo during pregnancy or is it better to DIY?



Put down the apple cider vinegar, step away from the kitchen and log off of Pinterest! I know it's tempting to toss your regular product, which contains a thousand suspicious sounding chemicals, but rather than concocting a DIY shampoo, you can find a brand that isn't loaded with nasties.

When searching for the perfect pregnancy-safe shampoos and conditioners, there are some rules of thumb to keep in mind. The jury is out on whether coal tar, which is found in many anti-dandruff hair products, is safe or not during pregnancy, so it's best to stay away.

One of the most common ingredients found in shampoo is sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS), which is a foaming agent and helps to give that nice lather. Lately SLS has been suffering from a bad reputation and has been linked to all sorts of nasty things. Many people are shying away from using shampoos with SLS because they also rob hair of its essential oils, strip away hair dye and chemical straightening agents and might even be making your hair frizzier. One of the reasons I don't love this ingredient is that it degrades the ridiculously expensive highlights I get painted on it every few months. There are so many SLS-free options out there at every price point that I'd say it's worth finding a product that doesn't contain it. But be warned, if you're used to using a shampoo with sulphates, you may miss that lathery feeling when you go SLS-free, so if your hair still feels unclear, then shampoo, rinse and repeat.

You might be tempted to only shop at health food shops for your shampoo and conditioner during pregnancy but it's really not essential. Many mainstream brands have removed SLS as well as other ingredients I don't like, such as parabens which can cause irritation on the scalp. Many organic or natural brands use a base of mostly botanicals and essential oils; some of which can potentially cause allergies to the scalp, so try a patch test before using on your entire head.

I need an easy, new (and forgiving!) hairstyle but don't want a frumpy mum cut. Any ideas?

Here's a little trick I've picked up over the years in the beauty industry, no one really looks at the back of your hair. As long as you've spent even a few minutes of time styling and blow drying the front pieces, you'll look put together. This is good enough reason to get a haircut with longish layers in the front. If you've been dreaming about a fringe, forget about it. You can revisit that fantasy in a few years when you actually have time to keep it in shape. You need a hairstyle that, when it grows out, will not require hair grips and loads of styling product to keep it from looking like a five year old went at it with a pair of scissors.

The million pound question is how to keep your hair in an easy style that doesn't require much time but still looks way cooler than a dreaded "mum cut". Meet the modern interpretation of the bob, the lob, which is basically a longer version of a bob, but with choppy layers and a bit of edge to it. A lob is totally versatile and is still long enough to swoop into a ponytail for those times having hair in your face is not ideal. Truth be told, most of the time I'm in messy-bun-getting-stuff-done mode, but for those rare occasions (i.e. when we have a babysitter), I will go all out and get a professional blow-dry. Luckily we live in a time where quick in and out blow-dry bars are as ubiquitous as coffee shops. There's nothing like a gorgeous blow out to make you feel like a celebrity.



Now that my hair is looking so fabulous, how can I avoid hair breakage?

Thanks to the crazy hormones that cause your hair to grow faster during pregnancy, it's probably looking pretty good, so the last thing you want to do is pull at your crowning glory and break your new luscious locks. Tight ponies are one of the culprits that lead to hair breakage, particularly if you're wearing a damaging hair band. Super-tight ponytails that pull at your scalp can also lead to headaches and who needs that when you're pregnant? So as long as you choose a more relaxing way to wear your beloved hairstyle, such as a low or loose ponytail, you should be ok.

Do yourself, and your hair, a huge favour and stop buying those cheap elastic hair bands with the metal thingies on them. They will break your hair, I promise. When you pull those suckers out of your ponytail, notice all your beautiful strands holding onto the metal piece for dear life. Don't be ashamed to resurrect your scrunchie, 90's style, a fabric hair band is preferred to elastic. Or better yet, try Invisibobble, which is a genius hair ring that resembles an old school telephone cord. It was created by two University girls who wanted ponytails with no headaches or kinks in their hair. As an alternative to a hair band, try a clip while you're pregnant, they can cause way less damage and don't leave ridges in your hair when you take them out. Clips are also amazing for securing twists and updos, all the better to let your hair dry naturally into gorgeous, loose waves.

My hair texture seems to be changing. Am I imagining this?

If you've ever wondered what you'd look like with curly hair or slightly more oily hair, pregnancy might just satisfy that curiosity. A change in hair texture is totally normal while you're expecting and just another strange but true side effect of your body creating another human life. Thank you hormones. While some women experience a total change from straight to curly, you might only notice a slight difference in your hair's behaviour. Some mamas-to-be with previously dry hair may discover it's oilier, or vice versa. Try not to freak out about your new look, embrace it!

If you've had straight hair most of your life and now have fuller and wavier new locks, find a curl-enhancing product rather than trying to straighten it into submission. Always apply the hair product onto damp hair and work through from roots to ends then let it air dry. It took me until pregnancy to finally appreciate my waves.

If your hair is greasier than normal, try washing it less often than you normally would. If that sounds counter-intuitive think of it this way shampoo can strip your scalp of its natural oils so it produces more oils to try and compensate for the missing ones. When you do shampoo and condition, take care to only use conditioner on the ends of your hair. You can also start using a dry shampoo to absorb some of the oil at the roots. Be careful not to touch your hair either; your hands and fingers have lots of natural oils on them that will be transferred to your hair if you play with it.



I swear my hair isn't falling out as much as usual, is this because of my pregnancy?

You're not going mad. If your hair feels thicker and more lustrous than normal there's a very good reason for this. You guessed it, it's those rascally hormones at work again, but this time you can thank them! Your new crown of full hair is something to be admired indeed.

You're not actually growing more hair, you're just not losing it as quickly as you typically would. You might have noticed there are less strands left behind in the shower or when you brush your hair. During pregnancy those higher levels of oestrogen in your body prompt your hair to remain in the growth phase for longer. While thicker locks may be a very exciting thing, those new hairs sprouting up on other parts of your body may not be so welcome. If you want to get rid of those pesky strays, stick to tweezing, waxing, or shaving and stay away from chemicals in bleaches or depilatories, which might get absorbed into the bloodstream.

While having this thick new head of hair is quite amazing, don't get too used to it. Once you deliver, your hair will go back to its pre-baby glory. After having your baby, the growth/rest hair cycle reverts back to its original pattern. Gentle scalp massages will help to increase circulation and stimulate new growth, which you can do whilst you shampoo and condition your hair.



Sleep

Hit the snooze button on
pregnancy insomnia

*“Creating tiny humans
is exhausting”*

Let's be real. Once you're pregnant, sleep becomes a lot more satisfying than sex, and there are definite physiological reasons for this. Your body is so busy, you know, making a human and what not, and the exhaustion sets in big time. In the first trimester your energy will just blow to smoke thanks to the placenta it created out of thin air. You might get a slight break from your fatigue in the second trimester but don't get used to it; in trimester three, when your almost full-sized baby starts to steal all of your energy again, you'll be back to falling asleep in your cereal bowl (better get used to that!).

As if trying to figure out a comfy position with your new Buddha belly wasn't hard enough, you can add those "only-in-pregnancy phenomenon", such as restless leg syndrome, reflux, nausea and back pain into the mix and you're set for some fun-filled nights (let's get this party started!). Investing in a body pillow is key, as is keeping a box of crackers for nausea at your bedside. Pregnancy gives you the perfect excuse to indulge in afternoon naps, so if your body is telling you to get some rest, do yourself a favour and listen.

I can barely stay awake during the day. Why am I so tired?

Creating a little person is hard work. It's no wonder you're feeling exhausted all of the time. The amount of overtime your body is putting in is no joke. Try to visualise for a moment, if you will, all of the physiological changes that are going on inside of you. From the moment your body realises it's pregnant, it begins to produce more blood in order to bring nutrients to your growing baby. Then of course there is the new flush of hormones that have just entered into your body, with progesterone being the main culprit behind your fatigue. Now add in all of the freaking out your brain is doing to try and grasp that you're going to become a mama. This baby-creating stuff is exhausting business indeed.

The first trimester tends to be the most exhausting, as this is when your baby's major organs are magically being formed. Don't worry mama, the second trimester will bring you a some much-needed relief and is often known as the honeymoon trimester. Embrace this reprieve from fall-down exhaustion as trimester three can leave you feel as your baby is hell bent on sucking all your energy from you.

Rather than fighting your tiredness, give yourself a pass to take an afternoon nap. If you work in an office, use your lunch hour for a power nap. Try and find an empty conference room, head to your car for a snooze or worst case scenario, lock yourself in a bathroom stall for 20 minutes and sit on the toilet. Hey, desperate times call for desperate measures. Daily exercise may sound like a special hell to you right now, but getting in about 20 - 30 minutes a day of some sort of body moving fitness will help you feel energised.



Are there certain positions that I should be sleeping in?

Finding a comfortable sleeping position while you're pregnant can feel like a mission impossible. The ideal sleeping position is on your side. Sleeping on your back puts pressure on your aorta and vena cava, which are the main blood vessels located just behind your bump. By sleeping on your back you could be compromising your blood circulation in your body and to your baby. Tummy sleeping is no good either, thanks to the pressure you'll be putting on your uterus, plus, your swollen boobs won't like that position very much. Sorry mamas, just one more habit to change.

Side sleeping remains the safest way to get your zzz's, and not to be too anal about it, but sleeping on your left side is better than your right. Experts say that left side sleeping will help your circulation by giving your nourishing blood the best direction possible from your heart to the placenta. Lying on the left side also keeps your expanding body weight from pushing down too hard on your liver.

The good news is now you can discover the awesome powers of the pregnancy body pillow, truly one of the best inventions of modern time. These are also known as sorry-babe-I-can't-spoon-with-you-anymore pillows.

Six years after giving birth and I still literally can't sleep without mine (as in, I take it with me on holiday), so it's a bit addictive. The comfiest way to use a body pillow is to hug it, which you'll want to do anyway since you'll be so happy you found something that allows you to sleep on your side comfortably. On a side note (pun intended), if you wake up in the middle of the night and have found yourself sleeping on your back or belly, don't freak out. Your body needs its rest and waking yourself up throughout the night to check on your sleeping position will lead to a poor night's sleep and a very unhappy mama the next day. Let your body figure out what it wants to do whilst you're sleeping, but help to guide it by falling asleep on your side.

Get yourself a
“Sorry babe I can't spoon
with you anymore” pillow

Pregnancy insomnia!

How can I get better sleep?

Ok so you might be totally exhausted, but unfortunately that doesn't save you from insomnia. Or, as I like to call it, fresh hell. Your brain and heart race while you obsess about the baby items you still need to register for or how you're going to fit a newborn into your studio flat. Pregnant or not, insomnia is no fun to deal with. Insomnia can mean you're having trouble falling asleep or you'll wake up in the middle of the night and can't fall back asleep.

Creating a pre-bedtime ritual can help ease you into sleep. Among one of the most important steps is unplugging and powering down your devices at least 30 minutes before bed time. We're all guilty of electronic overload. We tend to check our emails every few moments and remain glued to our devices. Facebook stalking your ex-boyfriend or a Google frenzy on which actress played the lead in that Netflix series can certainly wait until the next day. The light emitted from the screen messes with the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin and when you respond to an email your body gets all excited and physically reacts by releasing cortisol, which is that nasty stress hormone. And as we know, stress and sleep are like oil and water, they don't mix. Set your computer to automatically turn off at 9 or 9:30 pm. Turning it back on can feel like too much of a chore and will deter you from looking up said actress on IMDB. Put your phone on airplane mode and tell your partner to put it in another room if you have to.

Other pre-bedtime rituals that help set the tone for a good night's sleep include:

- A relaxing bath and a cuppa, but make sure it's caffeine-free and not too hot!
- Make sure your room temperature is set to your liking. Too hot and you'll be kicking off the covers all night; too cold and your teeth will be chattering.
- Do something that makes you happy every day. This may sound like a bumper sticker saying, but it's true and can actually help you sleep more soundly. Experts say the more fulfilling goals you've accomplished during the day, the better you sleep at night.
- Spend more time outdoors. Natural light boosts your ability to sleep at night; it also helps lift your mood and alertness during the daytime hours.

For those times that insomnia knocks on your door in the middle of the night and you can't fall back asleep, try getting out of bed. A middle of the night munchie might help: something simple and healthy like crackers or a banana, not that leftover Chinese food. Drink a glass of warm milk or try reading a book, the more boring the better, with a dim light.

Still can't fall asleep? Try listening to the Sleep With Me podcast, which promises to put you to sleep by boring the hell out of you with dull stories. The creator and host of Sleep With Me calls it "the podcast the sheep listen to when they get tired of counting themselves."



My legs feel like they need to get up and move while I'm in bed. What's going on?

Are your legs acting like they have somewhere to be whilst you're trying to relax and sleep? If so, you probably have restless leg syndrome (RLS) which is very common during pregnancy. RLS is the uncontrollable urge to move your legs, as if they've heard their favourite song and need to start dancing. While moving your legs around is not such a big deal say, at the gym, the problem is it typically strikes at night when you're trying to sleep.

There's no clear culprit behind RLS, but hormones, iron deficiency and circulation issues could be the reason it strikes so frequently during pregnancy. So what can you do about this annoying compulsion to break out into moonwalk? When I was pregnant, stretching my legs helped a lot, especially before bed, and other ways to combat RLS include:

- Asking your partner for a little leg massage at night. Better yet, have them use Mama Mio Lucky Legs™ during the massage. The cooling sensation will soothe the legs while the calming blend of essential oils will help keep your restlessness at bay.
- Taking a warm bath at night. Keep the temperature of the bath at your body temperature, which is 37°C (98°F).
- Making sure you're getting enough exercise during the day.
- Try applying either heat or cold to your legs. Use either a heating pad, a cold compress or a cooling skincare product (pregnancy-safe, of course).
- Don't get into bed until you're ready to go to sleep. Sometimes lying still for long periods will bring on the twitchiness.



“Take a warm bath at night, keeping the bath at your body temperature”

Why do I have to pee so much in the middle of the night?

I'm pretty sure my bladder shrunk to the size of a tiny bean when I was pregnant. During my pre-pregnancy nights I got up to pee at least once or twice in the middle of the night, and then add a baby to my belly and I was making a beeline, or pee-line, to the loo no less than four times a night. I would've been happy with a bed pan, though my husband wasn't so keen on that idea. Most pregnant women deal with the same frequent need to urinate, making it something of an inside joke and a pregnancy rite of passage. Much of my conversations started with: "You won't believe how much I peed yesterday!". As a mama-to-be peeing bragging rights are something to be proud of.

So why the heck are you peeing so freaking much? The amount of blood in your body increases by about 50% during pregnancy; that's a lot of fluid moving around in there, much of which gets filtered through your kidneys and eventually finds its way to your bladder. Another reason is the pressure being put on your bladder from that ever expanding uterus of yours. While the need to pee is ongoing during the day, it can ramp up at night thanks to the fluid from your legs and feet now finding its way to your bladder.

Staying hydrated is super important as a mama-to-be, so don't try anything foolish like not drinking water during the day to stave off your overactive bladder. What you can do is try and lean forward when you pee, to help get all of the urine out of your bladder. Also don't try to hold it in, as it could lead to the awfulness of a bladder infection. Speaking of which, if you have any pain whilst you pee, see your doctor straight away. It could be a sign of a urinary tract infection (UTI), which is marked by the feeling of peeing razor blades. You'll want to get that treated asap, not just to help with the pain, but leaving a UTI untreated could potentially turn into something much worse like a kidney infection or early labour.

Think of it this way: it's all good training for when the baby arrives and wakes you up every five minutes. Always a silver lining!

*“Staying hydrated
is super important”*

I'm not sure why they call it morning sickness when I feel the most nauseous at night. How can I quell my queasiness when I'm trying to get some shut eye?

If only morning sickness stayed true to its name, right? Unfortunately pregnancy-related nausea can and will strike whenever it pleases. They should really call it morning, noon and night sickness. Without fail, I would feel the urge to purge every afternoon around 4:00pm. Trying to find the nearest toilet became something of a parlour game during my first trimester.

I found my best fight against nausea was making sure I was never hungry. I quickly discovered that an empty stomach was an invitation for queasiness. Crackers became my best defence and keeping a packet of them on me at all times became essential. Evening time was not much better; if I had eaten dinner too early, the nausea would come back for more. That bag of crackers was transported from my handbag to my night stand. Even if I had already brushed my teeth, I'd give myself a pass to munch on a cracker before going to bed and it helped every time.

My other saviour was ginger. I bought bagfuls of chewy ginger sweets during pregnancy and became addicted to them. Ginger helps fight nausea like a champ so find your favourite way to ingest it, like tea or sweets, and go crazy. I also loved acupressure wrist bands, which have a knob that presses against an acupressure point on the inside of your wrist. I truly believe they did work, but it may have also been the placebo effect!

The strategies for fighting morning sickness at night are not that much different than keeping it at bay during the day. The only difference is you'll need to keep your anti-throw up arsenal near your bed for easy access. A drop of a nausea-fighting essential oil could help stave off the need to pray to the porcelain gods. Try dropping peppermint, ginger or lavender essential oil onto your pillow before you go to sleep.

How can poor sleep affect my pregnancy?

In general, a bad night's sleep sets the tone for a not so great day. Personally, if I don't get a solid eight hours, my kids can expect Moody Mama in the morning, a much grumpier version of myself that has no patience and becomes exasperated at the slightest moan and groan on their part. Seven to eight hours is the proper amount of sleep suggested for adults; however, due to all of the incredible changes going on inside your body, experts recommend nine hours of sleep a night during pregnancy. Sleep is truly the best medicine sometimes.

So what happens if you get a bad night's sleep? Sleep deprivation is a term that roughly means you have not gotten your usual amount of sleep within a 24-hour period. Many people think of sleep deprivation as something that only happens when you haven't slept all night or you've been subjected to some sort of torture, but that's not the case. Unless you're getting your full 8-9 hours, you can consider yourself sleep deprived.

How can sleep deprivation affect you? Women who are sleep deprived during pregnancy may experience longer and more painful labour, higher rates of early labour and caesarean section⁶. In general, if you're not getting enough sleep, you're probably not going to bed early enough. Set an alarm on your phone to alert you when it's time to get to sleep and then, you know, go to sleep!



Don't worry about your baby though, he or she is still getting adequate sleep even if mama is not. Your baby will sleep like a, well baby, regardless of what you're up to. Thanks to some pretty heavy duty insulation, known as skin, tissue, muscle and amniotic fluid, your baby has an awesome sound barrier between their comfy confines and what's going on in the outside world. However that said, mama still needs her sleep!

I find myself getting heartburn right before bedtime. How can I make it stop?

Heartburn can be an ongoing bother during pregnancy. If you never had heartburn before pregnancy, you're in good company. It's a burning sensation right underneath your breastbone that makes you feel like your stomach acids are about to spill out of your throat. Heartburn (also known as acid reflux) commonly affects pregnant women thanks to that good ol' hormone progesterone. The placenta is to thank (or blame) for all of that progesterone lallygagging around in your system. Progesterone relaxes the valve that keeps your oesophagus separate from your stomach and with your newly relaxed valve, some of those stomach acids are now creeping up into your gullet. Sounds pleasant, eh?

The million pound question from thousands of pregnant mamas: how to keep those nasty stomach acids from bothering you at night and stealing precious hours of sleep? Try cutting back on certain acidic foods that could make your heartburn worse, particularly in the hours leading up to bedtime.

The foods to avoid include:

- Chocolate (sorry!)
- Citrus juices
- Raw onions, garlic, black pepper and spicy foods in general
- Tomatoes
- Peppermint

In general, don't eat big meals; try for smaller meals throughout the day rather than three big meals and try not to eat too close to bedtime either. Getting into bed and lying down with a belly full of food could make matters worse. It's best to wait at least three hours after eating to lie down⁷. When you do go to bed, try propping yourself up with some pillows, which could help keep those acids where they belong: down in your stomach. If all else fails, speak to your doctor or midwife about pregnancy-safe antacids or medications to help put out the fires.



I've been having the nuttiest dreams lately. What's the deal?

Don't worry, it's completely normal to feel like every time you go to sleep you enter a science fiction novel. Your hormonal fluctuations could be the reason behind your nightly dose of vivid dreams, but you could also just be remembering them more clearly. The combination of getting up to pee, tossing and turning whilst trying to find a comfortable position and feeling the baby move around in your belly keeps waking you up. When your sleep is interrupted in the middle of a REM cycle, which is the phase when you're most likely to have vivid dreams, you'll be more likely to remember your dreams.

You're about to step into one of the most exciting roles of your life and as such, you're thinking about it all of the time, even while you sleep. Just like the nights before a big exam or your wedding, your dreams are filled with figments of what you anticipate for those big events. Some of the most common crazy dreams of mamas-to-be include representations of your baby, such as talking animals or sea creatures (your baby is indeed swimming around in your stomach). Some mamas have dreams that their significant other is cheating on them, which represents a fear of your baby-making partner not being there for you during your motherhood journey. Before you chuck your glass of water over them, remember it's just a dream. In fact, your partner is probably having some strange dreams themselves. Why not compare notes in the morning and have a good laugh together.

What are the best maternity pyjamas to help me sleep more like a baby?

Anything that feels comfortable! My favourite sleepwear during pregnancy was an old t-shirt that was a few sizes too large and a pair of boxer shorts. However, I did splurge on a very cosy pair of maternity-specific pyjama leggings and still wear them to bed now. You'll want to stick to PJs that are not too complicated to remove when the urge to pee in the middle of the night strikes. You'll also want to opt for a pair of bottoms that don't constrict your bump.

Now is probably not the time to shop for skimpy lingerie, not to say that you can't still slip into a negligee, if that's your thing. This is especially useful for more celebratory occasions with your partner, such as your birthday, anniversary or even your wedding night.

Look for comfy fabrics such as 100% cotton or jersey. Chances are you'll be doing lots of lounging around the house after the baby comes, so finding PJs that are also presentable enough to answer the door to the postman in are a good thing indeed.





Mindfulness

How to keep a clear mind
and stay (sort of) sane

“Clearing your mind is
key to your well being”

Mindfulness is an antidote to the 24/7 madness of social media and the epidemic of constant busyness we all face. During pregnancy, life seems to speed up and slow down all at the same time. The nine month s-t-r-e-t-c-h can feel like it's dragging on forever. At the same time you might feel like there are not enough hours in the day to fit in all of the doctor's appointments and prenatal labour classes. Add to this the constant prodding from your mother about your baby name choices, the jealousy over your friend's seemingly perfect pregnancy or the feelings of dread about becoming a new mama yourself. And for crying out loud, do you really need a birth plan?

This is where meditation comes in. The proper de-stressing techniques become instrumental to your well being and are a great way for you to manage all of the crazy aspects of pregnancy. Research shows that practicing mindfulness during pregnancy helps reduce pregnancy related anxiety⁸. Start now and you'll be way ahead of the curve, not to mention happier and more centered!

Pregnancy is stressing me out. How can I relax?

What! You mean the thought of bringing a new life into this world is causing you stress? This is no small feat you've signed up for and it's totally fine to feel a little overwhelmed by the whole thing. Becoming a mama is amazingly life changing, but change has an evil twin called stress. No matter how many friends or relatives you know that have gone through it, there's no real preparation for pregnancy when it's your own.

Firstly the barrage of tests you undergo during every doctor's visit is enough to put you on edge. I felt similar to a pin cushion during pregnancy, getting stuck with needles on an ongoing basis. While feeling stressed out during pregnancy is normal, too much of it is not good for you or your baby. Research shows that some forms of stress can contribute to lower birth weight and pre-term birth⁹. While you're likely going to have a healthy baby, it does pay to learn how to manage your stress. Instead of feeling guilty, which will only stress you out further, find ways to alleviate it. Here are some proven stress-reducers to try during pregnancy:

- Talking to other mama friends is a great way to relieve stress. If you don't have anyone in your circle who's pregnant or recently had a baby, there are loads of mama-to-be groups in your area—there are even apps out there that help local mamas find each other.

- Exercise is another great stress-reducer. Any pregnancy-friendly exercise can help. Even just 15 minutes of yoga stretches or an easy stroll outside can help you take some moments to unwind. Better yet, find an area with lots of trees. The Japanese practice something called "forest bathing" as a viable form of stress management. They spend time in the woods to lower levels of adrenaline, cortisol and other stress hormones¹⁰.
- Just breathe! Deep breathing techniques can help to calm you. Sit with a straight back, breathe in through your nose and hold for a few seconds. Exhale by pushing out as much air as you can through your mouth while contracting your abdominal muscles. Or try holding your right thumb over your right nostril, fully plugging it. Slowly inhale through your left nostril. When your lungs are full, pause for a few seconds then close off the left nostril with your pinky and breathe out through the right nostril. Next breathe in through your right nostril, pause, close it off with your thumb, and breathe out through your left nostril. Continue for about four rounds.
- Massage is one of the most luxurious ways to de-stress. Granted regular massage can get pricey, but pampering yourself is encouraged during pregnancy. Find a prenatal massage therapist and relax while their hands do the work.
- Focus on only one item on your to-do list at a time. There are a zillion things you want to get done before the baby arrives, but the truth is that most of them can probably wait. Edit your to-do list down to what actually needs to happen pre-baby and move the other items to a 'deal with it later'.

What are the symptoms of antenatal depression? How can I avoid this?

If you're not feeling so chipper every day, then it helps to know that, to a degree, having the baby blues is a completely normal part of pregnancy. There's a lot of information out there about postpartum depression, but antenatal (or prenatal) depression has been given a lot less attention. While the ups and downs of hormonally-charged mood swings during pregnancy are pretty commonplace, feeling more bad than good, or more anxious and overwhelmed than calm is something you should be concerned about. If not properly treated antenatal depression can sometimes even lead to postnatal depression.

Once you recognise that your blues are nothing to shrug off, it's time to take action. Talk to your doctor immediately and ask them for recommendations. Talking therapy can help, but you might be in need of medication. With the help of a professional therapist, you can identify the factors causing your depression and get help dealing with them properly.

If your everyday life during pregnancy involves one or more of these symptoms, you might have antenatal depression:

- Inability to concentrate
- Difficulty remembering
- Feeling emotionally detached
- Extreme irritability
- Sleeping too much or not enough, or restless sleep
- Endless fatigue
- Feeling isolated
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss/gain unrelated to pregnancy
- No interest in sex
- An ongoing feeling of dread
- Feeling like a failure
- Feeling guilty all of the time
- Persistent sadness
- Suicidal thoughts

A pregnant woman with blonde hair is sitting cross-legged on a bed. She is wearing a grey long-sleeved top and grey pants. She is holding her belly with both hands. The background is a softly lit bedroom with a white headboard and a grey blanket. A nightstand with some items is visible on the right.

*“This is no small feat
you’ve signed up for.
It’s totally fine to feel a
little overwhelmed.”*

Why do I feel depressed and anxious? Shouldn't I be over the moon?

Pregnancy-related anxiety is a real thing, so you should never feel ashamed or embarrassed to admit to yourself, or to others, that you're not on a constant mama high all of the time. Depression, and its faithful sidekick anxiety, tend to appear during stressful times in our lives and pregnancy is no exception. While this is also an extremely exciting time for you, it can also be incredibly overwhelming to deal with all of the changes that are taking place in your body and in your life.

Yes, there are so many exciting moments to look forward to as a mama-to-be, but there are also some pretty scary ones too. Some of the most common concerns you might feel right now that are causing you to become depressed or anxious are:

- Your fears about how this life-changing event will affect you and your significant other.
- Seeing your body transform.
- If you've had previous pregnancies that were difficult.
- The new lifestyle restrictions that pregnancy and motherhood will have on you.
- How you're going to balance work with your new baby.

It's helpful to know that depression affects about one in four women during some point in their lives. It can be easy to just chalk up the blues to all of your pregnancy hormones, but if you're feeling really down and can't shake it then it's time to reach out for some help. Pregnancy hormonal changes can affect the chemicals in your brain and have something to do with your feelings of depression. With the proper support and treatment, depression in pregnancy can be managed.

It's critical to seek out help not just for you, but for your growing baby. Depression can cause you to lose your appetite, become lethargic or turn to risky behaviours, which in turn could put your baby at risk.

“There are many exciting moments to look forward to, but plenty of scary ones too”

I've never meditated before but
keep hearing how good it is for you.
How can I start as a newbie?

Meditation is centered on the approach of training your mind, and much like you need to go to the gym on a regular basis to properly train your muscles, you need to practice mindful meditation regularly as well. The more you do it, the easier it will become, and the more you can apply mindfulness to everyday life.

The first time I tried meditating was only a few months ago. I wish I had discovered it during my pregnancy, but better late than never, right? You don't need any fancy mediation chairs or monastic-style robes to practice meditation, you just need a chair or a cushion and your mind. The key is focusing on your breath and your mind, but it's only natural that your mind is going to wander a bit towards thoughts of your upcoming work deadline or the laundry that needs folding, so nudging it back to your breathing every time you start to drift off is all part of meditation.

It helps to either try a meditation class or turn to an expert for some guidance. You don't need hours to devote to meditation either, you can start with just five minutes a day and still reap the benefits.



I'm obsessed with looking at all of these perfect pregnant women on Instagram. It makes me feel like crap. How can I stop these feelings of inferiority?

Social media, we all have such a love/hate relationship with it. It's both addictive and annoying and it can totally change how we view and feel about ourselves. As a single gal, it's easy to suffer from FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) as you click through all of the photos of your friends partying in Ibiza over the holidays. Once you become pregnant and then a mama, social media voyeurism becomes a monkey on your back and you're brought to a whole new level of feeling inadequate.

If you're anything like me then your feed is loaded with countless opportunities to become crazy jealous. All of those lovely fashion bloggers and celebrities looking gorgeous in their body-con maternity dresses, surrounded by Abercrombie model-looking children in their perfectly renovated kitchens - it's enough to give even the most self-confident mama-to-be bump envy.

Social media is not going away. In fact, there will only be more and more channels for us to gaze upon. Instead of falling into the trap of comparing yourself to every seemingly perfect celebrity mum influencer you see, try imagining them in their regular day to day lives, not the ones presented for you in the staged and filtered photo you see on your feed. What you're not seeing is the tantrum their toddler threw right before, or the 20 minutes it took them to squeeze into their skinny jeans, or the huge debt they had to undertake for their brand new chef's kitchen. Just remember, no one's life is perfect and you never know what's going on behind the scenes. These influencers get paid to project a perfect image. Enjoy the photo for its entertainment purposes, but repeat back to yourself: It's Not Real!

It also helps to limit the time you spend on social media. Give yourself a set amount of minutes to scroll through Instagram, but if you truly can't self-discipline and find yourself wasting hours on social media, you can set a timer on your phone and when it goes off, it's time for you to put it down and go for a walk.

How can I be more in the moment of my pregnancy and stop focusing on the future?

While pregnancy can be thought of as a means to an end, it's also an incredibly significant time in your life. In the grand scheme of things, nine months is a very short time and if you're about to become a mama for the first time, these nine months are your last burst of life without a child. Rather than spend it focusing only on what's next, it's good for your mental health to remain in the moment and allow each day to pass as slowly as possible.

Being mindful is all about being present and doing things with purpose. Being tied to our smartphones zaps the ability for us to connect in real time and depletes precious moments from our lives.

“Focus on things that bring you real joy”

- Rather than multitasking, try monotasking. At lunchtime, actually sit down and eat your lunch rather than try and sip a soup, check Instagram and pay bills at the same time.
- Stop checking your emails every five minutes. It takes your brain anywhere from 15 to 25 minutes to get back to where it was after you've checked your email. Set your phone so new emails only get delivered every 30 - 60 minutes and tell your boss and your family to text you for emergencies.
- Keep a diary during your pregnancy. Splurge on a beautiful paper journal and start writing down your thoughts every day with good old fashioned pen and paper.
- Underschedule yourself. Now is the time to enjoy moments to yourself, because in just a few months you'll need to lock yourself in the bathroom in order to get some alone time! Look at your schedule and edit it down to activities that are necessary, like going to the doctor, or things that bring you real joy.

How can hypnobirthing help when I'm in labour?

Hypnobirthing might sound like some sort of trance-like state, where mama gives birth while also clucking like a chicken until a hypnotist snaps their fingers. Rather, it's a technique similar to meditation that is applied specifically to the childbirth experience and has been gaining momentum of late. Hypnobirthing uses deep breathing and imagery techniques to help mamas deliver their babies naturally, but this method also allows for medical intervention if desired.

The premise behind hypnobirthing is to relax and ease the mama's mind and reassure her that childbirth does not need to involve pain. There are a number of different hypnobirthing programmes out there but the philosophy behind all of them is that giving birth is a completely natural process and it's only our fear that leads to pain. Women have been conditioned to think childbirth is painful and because of this fear, the body goes into fight or flight mode and prevents a pain-free labour and delivery. Hypnobirthing works by replacing fear with deep relaxation. If you're one of those mamas who's focused on the possible pain of labour, then hypnobirthing might be for you. The great thing about this method is that it can be used at any birthing facility, at the hospital or home birth, and has been shown to help women have shorter and less painful labours. There are classes that you can take that will teach you how it's done. Don't expect miracles, but as long as your doctor approves, hypnobirthing could be a safe and easy way to usher on a more positive birthing experience.





Do I need a pregnancy mantra?

I love taking yoga classes, but any time the instructor incites a group chant, I can't help but to feel a bit awkward. There's something about chanting out loud in a group setting that makes me feel like some sort of poser, so if the idea of creating a mantra sounds a little too out there for you, I get it.

A mantra is an easy-to-remember positive affirmation that encourages you to empower yourself, especially in times you're not feeling like Super Woman.

Think of a mantra as your own personal cheerleader, so before you pooh-pooh the idea, keep in mind that the act of reciting this special phrase to yourself can actually help reduce stress. Plus you'll never have to share the mantra with anyone else, nor do you ever have to say it out loud. It can be like your own personal theme song. Create an encouraging phrase like, "I am strong and ready to take care of my baby" and repeat it in your head over and over to help when stress or anxiety arise. It doesn't hurt to try, right?

I keep hearing about birth plans. Do I need one?

Ah the birth plan... Such a lovely concept but actually the logistics behind how you bring your baby into the world never quite materialise the way you want. I have a friend who mapped out her entire birth plan from first contraction to delivery, much of it included gentle massage from her husband, soothing music in the background and a picture perfect delivery room adorned with white orchids. The real life version of what happened is her contractions escalated so quickly that she had to deliver the baby on her kitchen floor with the help of emergency workers. Thankfully, her daughter was born healthy and is now a gorgeous 7-year-old.

Ask any of your mama friends if their birth plan played out as they had hoped. If any of them say yes, then they are full of rubbish and should never be trusted again. No two births are alike and trying to plan a fantasy version of how yours is going to be is a waste of time (in my opinion). You might hope for a natural birth, only to end up needing an epidural early on to help manage the whopping incredible pain of your contractions. Or maybe you've grown completely attached to your doctor but when you go into labour they happen to be sick or out of town. By trying to plan how your baby comes into this world, you're only setting yourself up for disappointment.

Thankfully, I did not have any detailed birth plan other than I was totally OK with pain medication. With my first son, I was one week past my due date and had to be induced. Long story short, I ended up needing a C-section almost 14 hours after being in labour. I was still not properly dilated; this baby was quite comfy in there and just not ready to come out. Side note: eight years later and Jonah still likes to take his time doing things. So when the time came for my second child's birth and I was given the option of a C-section, I jumped at it. A few days before my due date, we went in for a noon appointment and at precisely 12:25, baby boy number two was born. It was quite like going in for a teeth cleaning, except instead of coming out with a new toothbrush and dental floss, I had a new baby boy.

I highly suggest you forget about your birth plan and focus on an after-birth plan. Create a list of all the forbidden foods you've had to do without over the last nine months and get your hubby, mum or best friend to arrange a full on feast to be delivered to your hospital room. If you've been having visions of hunkering down with a plate of brie and pâté, now's your chance.

I'm worried about the pain of labour. How can I stop obsessing about this?

If you didn't wonder how something the size of a pineapple was going to make its way out of your hoohah, then you wouldn't be a normal woman. Even before getting pregnant, this is something I pondered often, but once I actually had a baby growing inside of me, I devoted much time to this train of thought.

Naturally, you might want to ask other mamas about their labour pains to help give you insight, but don't. Sure you might find the one mama who says hers was a breeze, but you're more likely to find someone who will use you as a captive audience and will go into excruciating detail about how it was the worst pain of their entire life, so spare yourself the pain of having to listen to someone else's sob story.

You've already had plenty of pregnancy related discomforts (back pain, nausea, etc.), labour will be just another one of those on the list.

Yes, labour is painful. The best way to describe the pain is the worst period pains you've ever had, but the good news is that, whether you know it or not, your body is prepared for labour. Giving birth is what the female body was created to do. More good news: as soon as you give birth, that pain is over and you have a new bundle of joy waiting for you. The best light at the end of the tunnel there could possibly be.

*“Giving birth is
what the female body
was created to do”*

If you find yourself obsessing about labour pain, there are some ways you can try and quieten down your mind:

- Childbirth classes can help you envision your labour and take away the mystery.
- Ask yourself: “If childbirth were that god-awful, why do so many women do it over and over again?”
- Empower yourself with feelings of strength rather than fear.
- Remember that pregnancy mantra? Repeat it back to yourself often.



Fitness

So, is this an excuse
to skip the gym?

*“If you thought pregnancy
was your ticket to sit on your
bum for nine months,
I’ve got a newsflash for you”*

There are so many benefits to exercising during pregnancy for mama and baby, including reduction of backaches and swelling as well as increased energy, lifting your mood and overall making you feel less blah and bloated. Plus, regular exercise can even help your ability to cope during labour. Never has there been so many choices on how to stay fit.

A few decades ago pregnancy was treated much like an illness, with doctors and midwives advising mamas-to-be that they should just rest and kick up their heels for nine months. But since then, experts have changed their tunes and recommend getting at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise daily during pregnancy, unless you fall under the high risk category or have a medical condition. The good news is that if you were active prior to pregnancy, you can more or less maintain the same level of activity. Sure you might need to modify some of your exercises, but if you’re smart about it, pregnancy shouldn’t put much of a change in your physical fitness plans.

A solid exercise routine will also take you far postpartum. Train your brain to include exercise on a regular basis and you won’t ever feel that it’s a burden. There are also strategic ways to sneak in a workout session that don’t involve you paying for a gym membership. I’ve trained myself to do leg lifts while unloading the dishwasher or squats whilst on a conference call. It’s all about multitasking!

I wasn't much of an exerciser before, why should I start now that I'm expecting?

If you thought pregnancy was your ticket to sitting on your bum for nine months, I've got a news flash for you; get up and get moving! I know, you're feeling large, nauseous and sleepy; there are a million excuses why it's just too difficult to exercise. By saying yes to exercise, you're saying no to gestational diabetes, jiggle bits and an overall feeling of blah¹¹. But wait, there's more! Ongoing exercise during pregnancy is linked to heart health for your growing baby¹², which is a major motivation for any mama-to-be.

Exercise can also boost your energy levels, help you to sleep better, improve your circulation, and reduce the pains associated with pregnancy. You know those awful muscle spasms and weird body aches you've been getting? Even just 20 minutes of moderate walking or stretching can help ease all of those not-so-fun symptoms.

Let's not tiptoe around the most obvious reason to get off the sofa during pregnancy: to avoid looking and feeling rubbish. Weight gain is going to happen, it's only natural and it would be dangerous not to put on pounds while you're pregnant, but staying fit and healthy are equally as important. Regular exercise will help ensure you gain a healthy amount of weight, but if you feel self-conscious about your new state of roundness at the gym, then do your exercising at home in private. There are loads of pregnancy-safe exercises you can do in your PJs or even naked if that's how you want to roll.



What are the best workouts during pregnancy?

Some of the best and safest ways to get your sweat sesh on during pregnancy are swimming, brisk walking, prenatal yoga, strength training (with light weights) and indoor cycling. Brisk walking is one of the easiest forms of exercise and does many things for your body and brain. I'm a fan of taking a couple of 15 minutes walks during the day to break the day up and to clear my mind. Walks are refreshing and a great time to unplug from technology.

Now is not the time to try any extreme sports or death-defying feats that would easily cause you to fall or hurt yourself and your baby. This includes, but is not limited to, downhill skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, bungee jumping, ice skating, hockey, sky diving, scuba diving, surfing or horseback riding. You should also avoid hot yoga during pregnancy, as heat can cause your body to think it's impervious to injury and let you take a twist that's potentially dangerous to your joints. Overheating can also be dangerous for your baby, particularly during the first trimester when the major organs are developing. Keeping this in mind, choose cooler temperatures for your workouts and drink lots of water before, during and after your sweat session.

Whatever workout you decide to do, make sure to stay away from positions that put you flat on your back, which can decrease proper blood flow to your heart. You'll also want to be aware of the pregnancy hormone relaxin that is now flowing through your body. Relaxin helps to... you guessed it, relax your body in preparation for labour and in doing so, it increases your flexibility and joint mobility. Thanks to relaxin, your body may think it's a yoga guru, but in reality you could really hurt yourself if you try to go too deep with your pigeon pose. Bottom line: know your limits.

*“Walks are refreshing
and a great time to unplug
from technology”*

I'm kind of addicted to working out, should I dial it down during pregnancy?

Love to feel the burn, do you? Good for you! You're probably in amazing shape and in which case you're going to be one of those annoying pregnant women that look supermodel slim from the back, and then shock the hell out of people when you turn around to reveal a watermelon sticking out of your torso. Lucky for you, you don't have to kiss your gym membership goodbye for nine months. If you have an active workout routine before pregnancy, you can most likely continue but always get consent first from your doctor before rushing like a mad woman to your next training session.

While there are some rare cases where exercise may not be advised during pregnancy, for the most part, if you have an uncomplicated pregnancy, getting your body moving for 20 - 30 minutes a day is extremely beneficial. However, it's important to speak to your doctor before starting or continuing any exercise regimen during pregnancy, especially if it involves high impact aerobics.

Whether you're addicted to HIIT workouts or SoulCycle classes, follow these top tips to make your workout safe and successful:

- Take frequent water breaks.
- Be sure to tell the instructor that you're pregnant.
- Avoid any jarring movements that entail jumping or a rapid changing of direction.
- Rather than using heavy weights, lift lighter ones but with more reps.
- Refrain from walking lunges, as they might cause injury to the connective tissue in your pelvic region.

What are some pregnancy-friendly exercises I can do at home?

You certainly don't need to be a fitness club member to get your daily workouts in. In fact, I haven't had a gym membership for over a decade. I hate feeling guilty about not going to the gym and would rather workout at home during breaks from work or in the morning before the kids wake up. Creating your own fitness routine at home has so many benefits; besides the extra money you save, you're also saving time. Getting to and from the gym eats into what precious time you do have. This is especially meaningful once you become a mama. Kiss that free time you had before goodbye!

There are many pregnancy exercises that can easily be done at home and don't require a fitness trainer. To tone the thighs and other wobbly bits on the legs, I love side leg lifts and squats. Here are some easy yet effective exercise routines you can do at home:

Exercise Ball Squats:

- Grow some balls, or at least one ball that is. I was a huge fan of using an exercise ball during my pregnancy, as it provided a squishy resistance.
- Place your exercise ball between the wall and the small of your back. Ensure you can see only the tips of your toes when you look down.
- Slowly sit into a squat. As you squat, keep in mind that your toes should be able to wiggle, since all of your weight should be on your heels.
- Slowly stand up again. (Repeat 8 to 10 times).



Leg Lifts:

- Lie on your right side, with your forearm supporting your head.
- Bend your right leg at a 45 degree angle and place your left leg straight.
- Put your opposite arm on the floor for stability. Lift your left leg to hip height and repeat. Next, bend your left knee and rest it on top of pillows for support. Straighten your right leg and lift it as high as possible. Repeat 10 - 12 times on each side.

Pregnant Plié:

- Stand parallel to the back of a sturdy chair with the hand closest to the chair resting on it, feet parallel and hip-distance apart.
- Turn your toes and knees out to 45 degrees and pull your belly button up and in.
- Bend your knees, lowering your torso as low as possible while keeping your back straight.
- Straighten your legs to return to starting position. Do this for 3 sets of 10 - 12 repetitions.



Should I stop doing my tummy exercises during pregnancy?

Doing abdominal exercises while you're harbouring a fugitive inside your tummy can seem like the ultimate twist of irony. You may not be rewarded with a perfect six pack but tummy-strengthening exercises can greatly improve your ability to push during labour, as well as help keep your belly in shape for an easier road back to a trim middle. Another major benefit to strong abs during pregnancy that is they can help to alleviate some of that godawful back pain you might find yourself with whilst carrying around a baby in your belly.

Strengthening your core during pregnancy does require some modifications though. You should not be doing the same crunches you did at the gym prior to getting pregnant. Laying flat on your back, especially after the first trimester, is not a good idea as your enlarged uterus could possibly interfere with the vena cava, the vein that brings blood to your heart. Try using a pillow or something to prop your head above your heart while doing your core work.

Another thing to look out for is abdominal separation, which is a widening gap between the left and right sides of your abdominal muscle, that sometimes happens when your baby grows. While abdominal separation is typically not anything to get overly concerned about, it could put potential tension on the entire area and might require even further modifications on your exercise routine. Ask your doctor about this and they'll be able to tell if you do indeed have it.

Here are some top pregnancy-friendly ab exercises. As always, speak to your doctor or midwife before embarking on a new exercise routine.

Standing Crunches:

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart.
- Draw your belly button into your spine, tuck your pelvis slightly under and bring your fingertips to your ears.
- Crunch forward and squeeze your abdominal muscles (just like you would if you were lying on your back).
- Release with control.

Heel Slides:

- Lie on your back with your upper back, neck and head propped up above your heart.
- Place your palms on the ground along your sides for support.
- Bend both knees and bring your feet in toward your bum.
- Remain with the heel hovering above the ground and extend one leg at a time.
- Bring it back in to starting position.
- Repeat with alternate sides.

Will I hurt the baby if I exercise?

If you're looking for an excuse to get out of exercising during pregnancy, hurting the baby is not going to be your get out of gym free card. Sorry ladies. Get out of your head the myth that exercise can shake your baby loose. The baby is safely cushioned by amniotic fluid inside your body and when done properly, exercise does way more good than harm during pregnancy. You must however, remain smart about the types of workouts you do.

If you're afraid that exercise will rob your growing baby of their essential nutrients, then you'll be happy to know that babies generally take what they need from you, meaning that it's you that might be left with a depletion of nutrients not the baby.

Exercising does give you a green light to consume more calories, but before you head to that bag of crisps, the calories should be healthy ones. And don't worry about giving birth to a too-skinny baby either. While babies of mamas who are physically fit may be born leaner, their organ size and head circumference are normal.

When should I stop exercising?

Getting your body moving, as long as you're not a high-risk pregnancy and your doctor gives you approval, is a good thing throughout your pregnancy. I can remember walking down the street at the end of my third trimester and needing to stop every few hundred metres to take a break because the baby was pressing against my pelvis. But walk on I did. You can continue a regular fitness routine up until you're birthing in the labour room, but use common sense and if things feel off, then just use walking or some light yoga as your main form of exercise.

Keep in mind that getting in some exercise doesn't have to be as formal as gearing up in your spandex and hitting the gym. You can count doing the dishes, taking the stairs and walking from your car's parking spot into the supermarket as exercise. As long as your body is moving, it counts. There's a reason fidgeters are generally skinny people, as all that constant moving of their limbs helps to burn calories and speed their metabolism up.

However, if you start feeling not-so-great during your exercise session, then use your head and stop. Red flags that something is not right while you're working out include: dizziness, headache, vaginal bleeding, chest pain, contractions or any sort of pain or swelling. These are serious warning signs and should be immediately reported to your doctor.

Will exercise help with my delivery?

Wouldn't it be nice if there was some magic way to make labour and delivery painless? An epidural sure can help, but maybe you're one of the brave ones who wants to fully embrace the birthing experience and decline anaesthesia altogether. In this instance, you're going to need all of the help you can get, and exercise is indeed a way you can try to train your body to get ready for pushing that baby out. Regular fitness will help improve your endurance, which is definitely a good thing during the labour and delivery process. My first son was born after over 14 hours of labour. My endurance levels were put to the test to say the least.

Certain pelvic exercises, called Kegels, in particular help to strengthen your vagina and can lead to an easier delivery. Kegels can actually help you after you've had the baby too, by preventing you from accidentally peeing your pants if things get a little stretched out down there. So how do you get your Kegels in? The beauty of these exercises is they're very discreet, so you can do them in your office, driving in the car or whilst waiting in line at the bank. The one time you don't want to practice your Kegels is when you're in the middle of urinating, which could lead to a urinary tract infection. Here's how to do it:

- Locate your pelvic floor muscles (they are the ones you use to stop yourself from peeing).
- Squeeze the muscles for about three seconds then release for three seconds.
- Repeat this for about 10-15 sessions.

Should I avoid running during pregnancy?

This may sound like common sense but if you were never a runner before pregnancy then now is not the time to start. However, if running has been your thing for a while then you can keep on doing it as long as you and your pregnancy are healthy and you have permission from your healthcare provider. The experts say it's safe to continue running right up until you go into labour.

As your pregnancy progresses, you may want to opt for lower impact exercising, as it may feel a little strange running with a 39 week belly in tow. If things don't feel right at any time during your run then listen to your body, it knows best. Also keep in mind pregnancy is not the time to compete with any pre-pregnancy running records. Talk to your doctor about your exercise plan and any precautions that may pertain to your individual situation.

“Regular fitness will help improve your endurance”



Will exercise help me fight the post-baby blues?

Let's be frank, if you feel overweight and out of shape, chances are you're not going to be happy with yourself. Add in the crazy amount of hormones rushing through your body and you have a recipe for the blues. Exercise can also help fend off feeling down during pregnancy¹³, but you must continue with your fitness routines after baby comes to continue reaping the benefits.

Postpartum depression is caused by many things including feelings of isolation, the stress of having a new human being to look after and the total change of lifestyle you're now experiencing. Maybe it's the endorphins that physical exercise releases, or the fact that you can feel yourself getting back into your pre-baby shape again, but exercise can absolutely make you feel like a human being again and not just a giant milk-producing boob.

Then there's the social aspect that exercise lends which can be a real mood-lifter. Getting out of the house during that haze of newborn feedings and nappy changes is necessary for your sanity. When my first son was only a few weeks old I cherished even a walk to the supermarket to see the world again, as it helped me realise there was more to it than just shit explosions and bottle warming.



Relationships

Repeat after me: "I love my mother-in-law, I love my mother-in-law, I love my mother-in-law"

“Who can think about sex right now anyway?”

As soon as that early pregnancy test proves you're about to have a child, your relationship with your partner changes drastically. Mama brain sets in and suddenly there's another person in your relationship: your baby. Pregnancy brings couples together but can also create tension. And what about the rest of your family? Once you announce your pregnancy to both of your parents, expect some shifts in dynamics.

From tuning out your mother-in-law's unwanted opinions to breaking the news to your best friend who's been trying to get pregnant for over a year, your #relationshipgoals are a lot more confusing and stressful. Your partner may feel as though they've taken a back seat, and who can think about sex right now anyway? Forget keeping the passion alive, you're just trying to get through the day without hurting someone's feelings. Navigating these tricky waters is not easy, but learning how to deal with it sets the tone for the next chapter in your life.

Can I still have sex when I'm pregnant?

You can have sex as much, or as little, as you want to during pregnancy. It's a total myth that your baby will be harmed during intercourse. As tremendous as your partner may believe his penis to be, it simply cannot stretch beyond the vagina. Not only that, your baby is safely tucked away in an amniotic sac, plus there's a nifty thing called the mucus plug, which seals your cervix and helps prevent any harmful bacteria from entering. It's always smart to get final approval from your doctor though before getting busy (and for your own piece of mind too).

Depending on how your body is reacting to all of the hormones surging through it, you could be in the mood for love or majorly turned off. Thanks to nausea during the first trimester the thought of sex might be the last thing on your mind, but if both you and your partner are game then go for it! If you're just not in the mood, there are other ways to bond and remain intimate as a couple. Snuggling and remaining in constant communication about how you're feeling will help you remain close. Sexting throughout the day can always help to awaken your flirty side, even if the two of you aren't getting hot between the sheets. Don't worry, you'll eventually feel like doing it again but there's no need to rush things along if you're just not into it right now.



Best sexual positions whilst pregnant?

If you're asking this question then bravo to you and your libido. Very impressive indeed. Your menu of sexual positions to choose from whilst cooking a baby in your belly can include the whole Kama Sutra if you're up for it. Really, you can be as adventurous or as basic as you want to be in the bedroom. Your first trimester will be the easiest to manoeuvre some of those more complex positions but as you get further along in your pregnancy, you'll want to accommodate for your growing belly.

The only thing to watch out for is laying flat on your back which could cut off the blood flow to your baby, so if missionary style is your thing you'll have to find an alternative position once your belly becomes larger. Also to note, oral sex is totally fine, just ask your partner to refrain from blowing air up there whilst he's doing his thing. This could block a blood vessel and cause an embolism, which would be harmful to mama and baby.

Here are some of the best positions you and your partner can try during pregnancy:

- **Spooning:** Sure spooning can be used for cuddle time, but once you take your clothes off and spoon, it becomes sexy time. For safety reasons, lay on your left side.
- **Mama on top:** This classic position is ideal for pregnancy. You and your belly are in control and out of the way.
- **Scissoring:** The scissors position can be a lazy, or pregnant, women's fave position for the shear (!) fact that you're basically just using your inner thigh muscles. The gentler and slower penetration will also be a welcome relief if you're in your third trimester.
- **On a chair:** Your partner sits on a chair and you're either facing him or facing away from him. Facing away from your partner is a good choice if you're still in the I'm-going-to-vomit-any-minute stage.

How can I get my significant other to feel more of a part of my pregnancy?

This baby didn't end up in your belly without a little help from your baby-making partner, however it can feel like this whole pregnancy thing is a one person job. After all, it's you making important sacrifices every day (oh sushi, how you are missed!) and the one whose body is undergoing some massive changes. If your partner is feeling a little left out, talk to him about it and make some effort to get him more involved. Here are some ideas that will make him feel more like a daddy-to-be and less like a bump bodyguard.

- Write letters to your new baby. You can each pen notes, separately or together, to the new little life you're about to bring into this world. You can be as mushy or as silly as you want. It's up to you if you're actually going to show these to your child.
- Let him feel your baby's movements. Have him put his hands on your belly during a time when baby is having a dance party in there.



- Enlist him to get healthy too. It might be too much to ask for him to cut out his daily coffee (we don't want to torture the poor guy), but having him cut down on alcohol and quit smoking (a big no-no around babies and pregnant mamas anyway) is a very good thing.

- This may seem obvious, but bring your partner to all of your doctor's appointments. Hearing the baby's first heartbeat and seeing the little bean on the ultrasound screen is enough to turn most dads-to-be into a pile of mush. Bring the tissues!

- Assign him to be your snack craving finder. My husband took great pride in seeking out my requests for strange snack cravings, some of them at odd hours of the night. I had a craving for frozen yogurt one evening at around 9pm. My husband got this wild look in his eye, grabbed his coat and keys and yelled: "Challenge accepted!" before bolting out the door.

About 20 minutes later he returned with a huge fro-yo covered in all my favourite toppings.

How do I tell my mother-in-law I don't want her opinion?

Funny how once you announce you're pregnant, your mother-in-law suddenly becomes an expert on all things pregnancy. From what you should name the baby, to where you should live, to the appropriate amount of weight you should be gaining, many mother-in-laws can feel like it's their place to share their thoughts. Whether it's your own mother or your partner's, there might be certain expectations on their end about their involvement in your new family. Unsolicited advice can be maddening. Talk to your partner about this and make sure you are on the same page, as nothing can cause an argument faster than disagreeing about the in-laws. Dealing with extra opinions and "help" from the grandparents-to-be is going to become your new normal, so it's best to build a solid strategy with your other half before the baby arrives.

First try telling her politely that you and your partner (her son) are figuring things out for yourselves as you go along, and if you need her opinion, you will certainly ask. If honesty doesn't work, then try meeting her next critique with silence. Rather than nodding your head and pretending you're listening to her, just look straight at her and say nothing. Silence can be golden. If this still doesn't shut her up then it might be time to sit down for a talk. This would be a good time to set the tone for how it's going to go down once the baby arrives too. Your mother-in-law might be feeling insecure about her new role and may just need some guidelines put forth by you and your partner. Come up with a game plan about how you envision her involvement during the rest of your pregnancy, including your labour and delivery, and share this with her in a firm but non-confrontational manner.



Give your mother-in-law a job to make her feel needed and important. Listening to her opinion on the safety of one car seat versus another is a lot more palatable than having to hear her go on and on about your decision to breastfeed or not.

I've never really thought of myself as maternal. Will a magical mama switch just turn on after I give birth?

Not to sound corny, but there's something about popping a baby out of you that completely changes your mindset. For most mamas, the second you lay eyes on that squirmy, wrinkly bundle of baby, your maternal instinct takes over, even if you thought it wasn't possible. I was never much into babies and didn't have nieces or nephews on my side of the family yet, but somehow my whole mentality did a 180° turn when I saw the little bean for the first time. The tiny person I was nurturing for the past nine months was finally out in the world. It was mind bogglingly amazing and a transformative experience I will never forget.

Becoming a new mama is much like stumbling upon a new-found talent you never knew you had. There is a scientific reason behind a mama's maternal instincts. Scientists say that the new mother's brain closely resembles what it looks like when you fall in love¹⁴.

Don't worry if you've never had a soft spot for babies in general, either. Research shows new mamas have stronger feelings about their own baby as



opposed to other people's babies¹⁵. Other studies have shown that the odour of a newborn is addictive and delicious to new mamas because it activates the reward circuits in your brain, the same circuits that make you crave certain foods. Experts also say that the more a new mama is involved in childcare, the stronger the bond will be; something to consider when handing over some of the baby duties to a nanny or your mother-in-law. Changing nappies may not be your idea of fun, but there's a payoff in the end. Establishing this close bond with your little one straight out of the gates will also help to ward off postpartum depression. A win-win for both you and baby.

And if you're wondering, yes, there is a daddy switch that gets turned on as well. Again, the more childcare responsibilities the father takes on, the higher the brain activity which supports that parental bond¹⁶. In other words, rather than you being the one on designated nappy duty, ask your partner to clean up the huge, smelly blowout waiting in your little one's nappy. It's good for him.



My childless friends are acting weird around me now. Are these friendships doomed?

Let's start by stating the obvious here: there will be changes in the dynamics between your child-free friends and you. Whether they are trying to get pregnant themselves or still on the hunt for a husband, the life changes you are going through as a mama-to-be could be stirring up all sorts of feelings inside your child-free friends.

Just because you have a tiny human growing inside of you and your priorities are shifting doesn't mean you don't have time for your old friends in your life. In fact, it's your child-free friends who might be the ones to help you out when you're deep in the woods with your newborn. Think about it, another mama friend is not going to have the time to run over for dinner while your partner is working late to help give you a hand with bathing baby.

It may take some extra effort on your part to make your friends feel included in your new role as mama-to-be and eventually mama. Pregnancy still allows you the time to indulge in hour long convos about your best friend's atrocious blind date the night before or her promotion at work, but once the baby comes you'll barely have time to brush your teeth.

You might want to have a heart to heart with your non-parent friends and tell them how much they mean to you and how much you appreciate their support. They've showed up for your baby shower, listened to you complain about your swollen boobs and your mother-in-law's whining fits. Let them know things might be tricky at first as you try and figure out this whole parenting thing, but your friendship means a lot and you don't want to lose them in this process. Your childless friends might be afraid of losing you and could be giving you space to protect their own feelings. Reassure them they're needed and bestow a fun title on them like 'Tata' which is a French version of aunt or 'Unks' and give them a special role once baby arrives.

“Tell them how much they mean to you”



How do I tell my bestie who's been trying to get pregnant that I'm expecting?

While it can take some couples months or even years of trying, it can seem like others become pregnant just by sneezing. Ok, sneezing and being naked with their partner on top of them. I have to admit I was one of the latter. For my husband (fiancé at the time), the first time was literally a charm. Not many people plan a pregnancy five months before their wedding.

So now that you're happily pregnant and ready to share the news, how do you break it to your friends who are dealing with infertility? Carefully and thoughtfully are the key words here.

The best way to tell her:

- Share the news tactfully. Make sure to tell your friend first before making an announcement on social media. When you do tell her, say it without making such a huge deal about it. More like: "I've got some news to share." Less like: "Guess what?? I'm pregnant!" Don't be disappointed if she doesn't share your level of enthusiasm. This is going to hurt her no matter what. Just accept it and try to understand how she feels.
- Don't vent about your morning sickness or any other pregnancy downers to her. Regardless of how miserable you're feeling, she'll wish it was her going through those un-fun stages. Instead, complain all you want to your partner, your mother or your sister who already has two kids.
- When you do speak to her or spend time with her, don't let your pregnancy become the focus. Try to deflect attention away from your bump and instead veer the conversation to any other subject: your annoying mother-in-law, her new job or your other friends latest blind date.
- Don't feel weird about including her in certain things. She's still your close friend and it would be strange not to have her involved in some of the more special and celebratory parts of having a baby, such as your baby shower or choosing a name.



How do I tell my boss I'm pregnant?

If the thought of breaking the news to your boss makes you feel uneasy, don't worry, this is one of those conversations that plays out in your head a million times, but is actually not so difficult to have in reality. The truth is, they probably already have an inkling that you're pregnant anyway, especially if you've had more doctor's appointments than usual or if they noticed you forgoing your morning coffee.

How and when to tell your boss about your pregnancy can be very subjective. Much of this depends on the relationship you have with your superior, your office culture and if your boss has kids of their own. Let's start with the basics: you don't actually need to tell them until after the first trimester, which is when it's safe to start spreading the news to your friends and family.

Once you hit the 12 - 16 week mark, you should schedule a time to speak to your boss. Don't tell them whilst on the way to a meeting or when they're getting ready to leave for the day. Waiting too long could come across as deceptive, plus you don't want the news to leak out before you have had a chance to tell them. Sharing the news along with the office gossip before you tell your boss is a big no-no and there also might be some benefits your company offers to pregnant women that you'd want to take advantage of.

Make sure to do your homework before your conversation and read up on your company's policies regarding maternity leave. You should also be forthcoming about your intentions to come back to work after your maternity leave and if there's a possibility you'll want to cut back on hours or not come back at all, the right thing to do is share this with your boss.

This is also a good time to explore the option of working from home one or more days a week. Find out if other mamas in your office work from home and talk to them about their arrangement. There are definite pros and cons, with seeing the kids during the day being the biggest positive. You'll still need a sitter around to help out, although I have done my fair share of conference calls with my baby on my boob and the mute button firmly pressed.

Do I really need to invite anyone besides my partner into the labour room while I deliver?

Technically you don't need anything besides your vagina and your doctor in the delivery room. But unless you've got a medical reason for your partner not to be in the delivery room, or if you've used a sperm donor, then you'll most likely want the guy who knocked you up to be bedside for the whole graphic and insane process of giving birth. Any other attendees are just extras.

If you've always dreamed of having your mum in there with you, then make sure to talk to your partner about this well in advance. He could have other ideas about the delivery room guest list. You get the right of first refusal, after all these are your private parts on display, not his, and if the idea of having your father-in-law in the delivery room gives you the heebie-jeebies, then your baby can wait to meet grandpa after all of the labour business is over.

If you do want an entourage whilst you're giving birth, check with the hospital to make sure they allow such a thing. Find out their rules about maximum capacity and any other guidelines they put forth. Bringing your healthy child into this world should be your and your partner's priority. If grandma's feelings get hurt, then she'll need to learn to grow a thicker skin.

My partner keeps saying "we're pregnant" and it's bugging the heck out of me. How do I nicely tell him to stop?

You must admit it's kind of cute when your partner boasts to a passer-by: "We're pregnant!" No? Not doing it for you? It's better than the alternative, which would be him telling people it's not his baby and running the other way when you and your big bump came barrelling over, right?

I'm pretty sure your partner knows that he's not carrying around a human life in his belly, only to squeeze it out of one of his tiny orifices in nine month's time, but if you feel like digging your fingernails into his arm every time he utters the phrase "we're pregnant" then a talk is in order.

Be honest with him and tell him simply, we are not pregnant, I am. If you need to spell it out, do so gently and point out: We are not puking every three hours, I am. We are not having to wee every hour, on the hour like clockwork. We are not busting out of our jeans or having trouble tying our shoes. Yes, you are going to be a father and your life is about to change in so many exciting ways. But for now let's just stick with phrases like: I'm going to be a daddy. We're having a baby. My wife is pregnant. I'm in awe of my amazing wife and the miracle of pregnancy.



Lifestyle

When you start cleaning
the house at 1am you know
you've got the nesting bug

“For anyone wondering how far along I am, I’m at the stage of pregnancy where I can’t look at a puppy without crying”

Jane, Manchester

Remember that carefree life you had just a few months ago? You know, the one where you could have a glass of wine after work without having to think twice about it. Yeah, forget it. Now you’ve got a new life, full of other things to ponder, such as: will I poo myself during labour? What the heck is nesting? And will my life ever be the same again?

Let’s start with no, your life will never be the same again. But is that really a bad thing? In exchange for endless amounts of time obsessing over how your bum looks in your new jeans or how many likes your updated profile pic got, you’ll be rewarded with a delicious newborn baby who cries, poops and loves you more than anything in the universe. Now that’s not such a bad trade-off, don’t you agree?

When will I first feel my baby move?

When you feel that first flutter of movement inside your belly, it's a pretty incredible moment. At this point you've had several ultrasounds to prove there is more than just an extra helping of spaghetti carbonara inside your belly. So, sure you've seen proof that there's a baby growing inside of you, but that amazing feeling of a little life jabbing away inside your body is tangible proof that indeed you're going to be a mama.

The first movement typically happens somewhere between 16 and 25 weeks. For first time mamas-to-be, it's usually closer to the 25 week mark. Some mamas describe the first movement to feel like butterfly flutters, but I found it to be more like a bag of microwave popcorn with the kernels popping in my belly. This early movement, which is known as "quickening," is an odd sensation but also kind of amazing.

As your pregnancy progresses, those light flutters can become real digs. You might get jabbed in your ribs or feel an elbow to your belly, depending on where the baby is positioned. You can even poke back where you felt a little foot kick and see if your baby feels like playing back with a return kick. If you really want to get your baby to move around, try drinking some juice. When your little one gets a rush from your blood sugar, it sometimes gives them a burst of energy. Outside light and noises could also cause your baby to throw a dance party in utero. I remember going to the cinema during my first pregnancy and not being able to concentrate on what was on the screen due to the endless somersaults my son was doing in my belly.



Every baby is different and their movement patterns will vary. You may have a baby that loves to sleep while you're out and about during the day. Or a baby that starts to get all antsy when it's your bedtime. Talk to your doctor about how much movement you should be feeling a day, if you detect much less movement than typical, you should call your doctor immediately to be on the safe side. Your baby's kicks are their first mode of communication with you. Enjoy it because before you know it, they'll be asking to borrow the car.

What do I really need in my labour bag?

While this isn't the time to pack like you're going on a weeklong holiday to the Caribbean, you should spend some time figuring out what you're going to bring with you for your hospital stay. What you don't want to do is save this for the moment you go into labour, which could translate into a bag of whatever was easiest to grab on the way out the door. If you have your labour bag ready to go by the time you hit the eight month mark, you should be good to go.

The typical hospital stay for a regular vaginal birth is two nights, while a cesarean section could mean as many as four. Since you never really know how long you're going to be in the hospital for, it's best to pack an extra day's worth of stuff. Every mama is going to have different must-haves they want with them at the hospital but here are some of the essentials that should be in your labour bag:

- **Dressing gown:** You can throw your dressing gown on over whatever ensemble you're wearing, or over your birthday suit. Those hospital gowns leave a lot to be desired in the style department, plus any movement and your boobs and bum are on display for the whole maternity ward to see.
- **Nursing tank tops:** I would add in nursing bras too, but the idea of putting on a bra whilst I was in the hospital makes me laugh. You will want an easy way to get your boobs out of your top though. Newborn babies can be hungry little things and you probably won't want to walk around topless; you never know when your brother-in-law might pop in for a visit.

- **Nipple balm:** Your boobs will do great things over the coming months. Show some love to them and treat your nipples to some TLC. Dry, cracked nipples are just a fact of life when you're breastfeeding. By taking care of them from the beginning, you'll be setting the stage for breastfeeding success. Mama Mio Keep Calm Nipple Balm™ provides relief and protection with ultra-soothing medical-grade lanolin, organic coconut and olive oil as well as organic shea butter. The ingredients are safe for baby, so no need to wash off prior to breastfeeding. It's a multitasking mama must-have. You can use it on cuticles, lips and elbows too.
- **Comfy undies:** The roomier and softer the better. This is the time to invest in some granny pants as you'll need underwear that's big enough to hold sanitary pads. There will be blood. Possibly a lot of it. Leave your thongs at home for another time, in the way distant future.
- **Slippers:** The hospital floor is not your friend. Protect your feet from the cold and germ-infested linoleum. Also, slippers will become an essential part of your postpartum uniform. Trust me on this.
- **A journal or notebook:** This is not for writing down all your overwhelming emotions, although if you want to do so, by all means write your little heart out. The notebook is actually for a more practical purpose, keeping track of your baby's feeding schedule and all of their poos and pees.

- **Stuff for your baby:** Not surprisingly your baby doesn't come out of your belly in clothing. Be prepared for your little one to go through a ridiculous amount of wardrobe changes over the next few months. Pack at least three babygrows so your new bundle of joy doesn't have to lay around in soiled clothing and bring a baby blanket if it's cold outside. Don't forget a bottle and some nappies too and have at least a dozen of each at home.
- **Your favourite snacks and drinks:** Your labour could possibly drag on for hours and you'll need some fuel. Rather than trust whatever possibly dodgy items are in the hospital vending machine, do a trip to the supermarket and stock up on non-perishable treats to bring with you to snack on. Also make sure daddy-to-be has his favourites stocked up too as well as magazines or a book.
- **Phone and charger:** It should go without saying to bring your phone and/or tablet and laptop. Don't forget your charger!
- **Shower shoes/flip-flops:** I never like to take showers in shared bathrooms without properly safeguarding my feet from whatever nasties could possibly be lurking on the shower floor.
- **Toiletries:** Bring the essentials of a toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, face wash and moisturiser. Don't go to the hospital expecting to have much time to do a full face of makeup. The Mama Mio Push Pack™ is ideal to throw in too, it contains a light, refreshing face mist and a multi-balm, as well as a nourishing massage oil and flannel.

Whatever you do, do not forget to bring lip balm. There's something about the combination of dry hospital air plus extricating a baby from your body that produces the worst chapped lips you've had in your life. The Mama Mio Superstar in a Jar Multipurpose Balm™ that comes in the Push Pack is a dream. It's a multi-purpose luxurious wonder balm made with baobab oil, beeswax, almond, coconut and olive oils to soothe and heal dry, cracked lips. This stuff is amazing. You can also dab a little to tame your brows before posing for that post-delivery money shot with your new nugget nestled in your arms.

- **Hair ties:** An absolute must unless you want to be eating hair while you're in labour.
- **Ear plugs and eye mask:** Hospitals are noisy and bright places that don't shut down at bedtime. A new mama needs her rest.
- **Clothing for the stay:** Loose and comfy are the key words here. A nightgown or a long dress are ideal since you may not feel like putting any pants on. Your entire lady region will either be sore or you'll have had a C-section, which means nothing rubbing against your stitches. If you are going to bring trousers, make sure they're super loose at the waist or have drawstrings.
- **Email and call list:** You'll probably have two lists here. One will be your inner circle of friends and family that will receive a good old-fashioned phone call the day of the birth, while the other list will be of friends to email/text when you or your partner are ready to share the news. Either way, you'll want to prepare this before you go to the hospital.



Is there a reason everyone is telling me my life is over?

People like to be dramatic. Particularly when trying to explain to their mama-to-be friends what their new life with a baby is going to be like. To be frank, your old life is over, but don't freak out. Your former, child-free life may have been carefree and loads of fun, but you've likely grown bored from all those hours spent focused on yourself, otherwise, you probably wouldn't have considered becoming a mama in the first place.

While you might get nostalgic for your child-free days, which is totally normal, you'll often find those days were much better in memory, than they were while you were living them. After all, how many times did you actually drop everything to travel to Burma on a whim? Becoming a mama gives you a purpose in life that far surpasses the feeling of scoring a prime dinner reservation at the latest hot spot. So your life will not be over, it's just going to change.

You'll appreciate the nights you do get off for a few hours whilst the babysitter or grandma is looking after the baby. On my first date night with my husband after we had our first son, we spent half of the time looking at his baby pictures on our phones and the other half talking about how cute he was. It may sound pathetic now, but there's a switch that goes on in your brain that automatically turns you into a baby addict once your little one arrives.

I know I should be “nesting,” but what are some ways I can prepare my home for baby without spending thousands of pounds?

Nesting, the rite of passage for all mamas-to-be, is when you're overcome with the need to get your home ready for the arrival of your newest family member. For some of you, the nesting instinct may never strike, while for some it could manifest in the form of wanting to clean and sterilise your home to the point where you could perform surgery on the kitchen table.

The desire to nest typically strikes in the third trimester when shit starts getting real. If you suddenly find yourself logging hours on Pinterest creating baby nursery boards, even if you live in a one bedroom flat, you know you've been bitten by the nesting bug. The temptation to spend your monthly paycheck on cute crib sheets and rustic woodland nursery designs is an ongoing struggle. Since you've got to save your money for things like, you know child care, tutoring and University, learn to curb your overspending habits now.

So what can you do that will have major impact but not deplete your bank account? Use this checklist to make sure you're spending your precious nesting time focused on items that will really make a difference and make your life easier once the baby arrives.

- **Select where your baby will sleep:** Whether you're using a cot, Moses basket, or a baby nest, determine where your little one will be spending their sleeping hours and in which part of your house they will be.
- **Clean up and detox your space:** I'm not talking about spending loads of money on organic cleaning items, but merely doing a good and thorough house clean. Rather than using bleach and chemical laden cleaners, search for natural DIY solutions.
- **Buy some plants:** Adding some greenery to your home will provide a natural way to clean the air and add some earthy decor. Just make sure they can be safely put somewhere baby won't get to them.
- **Now is also the time to start enforcing a no-shoes policy in your home:** The bottom of your shoes is probably one of the most toxic spots you'll find. Any carpeted areas will trap the bacteria from your shoes more than any other spot and guess where your little one will want to crawl and hang out, the floor, especially the carpet.

How can I meet other expectant or new mamas in my local area without seeming like a stalker?

Trying to make new mama friends is a lot like entering the dating pool again, even down to the pick-up lines. Don't be surprised if you find yourself asking another new mama: "Come here often?" at the playground. It can all seem a bit forced, but having a new baby, levels the playing fields and more often than not the new mama you're trying to pick up will welcome your cheesy icebreaker with a smile and some sort of complaint about how her little one kept her up for hours last night.

Use social media to your advantage. If you happen to see that a friend of a friend on Facebook just had a baby, ask your mutual friend to introduce you. There are also many new apps for mamas that will help geographically pair you with like-minded mamas in your area that are looking for playdates. I used to call these blind meet-ups 'mum dates' and had my fair share of strange experiences. I once attended a mummy-meet-up of mums who thought sharing bottles was normal. When one of them asked if her baby could drink from my son's bottle before he had a chance to finish his milk I politely said no and then legged it. Then there was another mama I had a first date with that didn't believe in vaccinating her baby... my string of bad dates became dinner fodder for my husband every night. However, I did finally meet a couple of new mamas who were just the right mix of feminist and sarcastic as I was. One I met in a playgroup and the other I met through my son's nursery school. Today, I no longer call them mama friends, they're just friends that also happen to be mamas.



I'm afraid I'll be bored to death during my maternity leave. Any activities I should plan?

Boredom during the first months of motherhood is about as likely as a pig that flies. Sure, the taking care of a baby business may not be filled with hours of excitement, unless you count the times you get a surprise poo explosion when you open the nappy for changing time. Things will get monotonous, the constant crying, the never-ending feedings and the crankiness (both you and the baby) will be ongoing. There will be days when a hot shower just isn't possible and you feel like you're going to lose it, but just as any other phase in your life, this too will pass. There was a phrase my pediatrician repeated to me during those first months and it still sticks with me to this day: "The days are long, but the years are short."

If you do find yourself scrounging for something to do during your precious days off from work, here are some ideas:

- **Create a baby book:** This is something I still have not done. Sure I have thousands of digital photos of my little ones and even a box full of actual printed out photos, but I never made a proper baby book. You don't need to make a traditional baby book like your mum probably did for you, there are many digital options online.
- **Go for long walks:** It may sound trite, but once you're back at your office, you'll be longing for the great outdoors. Plus long walks in the buggy are a surefire way to calm your baby down and make you feel a little more sane. It will help clear your mind and get some exercise.
- **Give yourself nap time makeovers:** Whilst baby is sleeping, do your nails or slap on a mud mask. Use those sacred nap hours to make yourself feel pretty. You'll appreciate the moments of self-pampering because once baby wakes up, it's all about them again.
- **Write thank you notes:** You'll receive tonnes of baby gifts from well wishers you haven't heard from in decades. Now it's time to crank out those thank you notes. If you don't write them now it will haunt you forever.

I'm hoping to sneak in a babymoon before the little one arrives.
What precautions should I take if I'm travelling during pregnancy?

Good for you! If you can sneak in one last child-free holiday, then by all means get yourselves on that flight. My babymoon coincided with my actual honeymoon; I got married in my second trimester and was given the green light to travel from my doctor. My new hubby and I travelled around Italy, Ireland and Amsterdam for over two weeks and it was amazing. My bump was just barely showing at that point and my need to vomit every three hours had dissipated. I took a long cat nap every afternoon in the hotel and felt energetic enough to explore. Except for the fact that I couldn't drink any wine in Italy or any beer in Ireland I loved every minute of our trip.

If you're considering booking a trip during your pregnancy, the first order of business is getting approval from your GP. If you're having an uncomplicated pregnancy, you should be fine. The second trimester is the best time to go away, when your morning sickness has gone and there's low risk of going into premature labour and this is also the time you're feeling more like yourself (less cranky and tired). If you are going to travel during pregnancy, here are some important tips to remember:

- Bring a signed document from your doctor stating your due date and that you've been approved for travel. Some airlines require this.
- **Buy compression stockings:** Sitting for long hours on a plane, train or car is bad for your circulation, especially if you're pregnant.



You'll also want to get up and walk around the airplane for a few minutes every hour.

- **Stay hydrated:** Airplanes have a way of dehydrating your body so drink water throughout the flight. You'll have to pee more, but getting up to find the loo will also help your circulation.
- **Ask for an upgrade!** Don't be shy. Many airlines will upgrade pregnant mamas to business or first class if there's availability.

I'm a little anxious about this whole idea of taking care of a baby. Would a doula help?

When I was pregnant with my first son all of my other mama friends were getting baby nurses, which are nannies specifically trained in newborn skills. They sleep at your home for the first weeks or months and tend to the baby's needs. So I interviewed a few myself and was all set to hire one when it dawned on me this stranger would be sleeping in our one-bedroom apartment and sharing the living room area with my newborn baby. I'm not a fan of making small talk in general and the sudden realisation that I would need to share everything with this new person during one of the most stressful periods of my life put me into a panic. Not only that, but I felt like it should be me or my husband wiping our newborn's bum and feeding him in the middle of the night, not this very nice stranger whom I had only met weeks before.

Instead of a baby nurse I decided to get a doula. A doula is a trained professional who gives physical, emotional and informational support to a mama during the prenatal and postnatal periods to help her achieve a healthy and satisfying early motherhood experience. In other words, a doula is there for the mama, not for the baby.

A doula is a mother's helper that, depending on her skills, will do everything from giving you a massage during labour to teaching you the best positions for breastfeeding. Doulas will come to the hospital to help out during the birthing process if you wish and provide relaxation techniques as well as just overall help to you and your partner.

Our doula, Pamela, knew exactly when to step in and when to back off. She made herself available for labour, but I decided to have her start once we got home from the hospital with the baby. She came over the next day and brought essential oils to help give me a back massage whilst I was breastfeeding. She also showed me the proper way to bathe the baby and taught me how to swaddle. She was a dream.

I found my doula through a friend's recommendation, but I made sure she was certified. The Doula UK website (doula.org.uk) has a searchable list of doulas in your area so this is a good place to start. Honestly I found the doula option to be the perfect answer. Even with a mum or mother-in-law around to offer their help, which has its pros and cons, I needed someone around to help me, help my baby and to show me the ropes with no judgements or pretences.



Nutrition

Dos and don'ts for your pregnancy diet

*“By the end of my pregnancy there
were at least 7 jars of unopened
pickles in my cupboard”*

Fay, Lancashire

If you thought the term ‘eating for two’ meant you had carte blanche to snarf down a daily take-away with reckless abandon for nine months, then it’s time for a wake-up call. Never has it been more important to watch what you’re eating. In fact, doctors say pregnant women only need to consume an extra 300-500 calories a day depending on the trimester (that’s barely more than a bagel).

What eating for two actually means is taking a lot more care to ensure you’re getting proper nutrients at all times. Each meal is an opportunity not just to nourish your own body, which is working overtime, but to also feed the little one growing inside you. Easy enough, right? Not so much when you feel sick constantly and grossed out by the thought of a salad. Your daily vitamins are a necessity during pregnancy too, but what if trying to swallow them every day makes you gag? Learning the best alternatives to junk foods and ways to quell your nausea are key components to a healthy pregnancy.

I'm having major caffeine withdrawal. Can't I just have one tall latte in the morning?

If your favourite motto is “But first, coffee,” you’ll need to change your morning routine up a bit during pregnancy. The data linking caffeine to a healthy pregnancy is confusing and inconclusive. Pregnant women don’t want their babies to become guinea pigs for experiments involving caffeine dangers so there’s no human data showing how detrimental, or not, your daily cuppa can be. The studies that have been done were performed on animals and showed decreased fertility, increased risk of miscarriage and birth defects, so while we’re not exactly sure what that means for humans, we do know that caffeine crosses the placenta and can affect your baby.

Since we don’t really know how much caffeine is too much during pregnancy, it’s best to remain cautious. The recommended amount of caffeine is less than 200mg a day, which is about the size of a small cup of coffee. While coffee and soft drinks are obvious forms of caffeine, be mindful of other things that may contain caffeine such as coffee ice cream, chocolate milkshake, energy drinks, hot cocoa, tea and even some over the counter medications.

Caffeine can also prevent you from getting proper sleep and makes you pee a lot more; two things you definitely don’t need to deal with during pregnancy. The good news is that pregnancy has a funny



way of self-regulating you. Thanks to my awful morning sickness during my first trimester, even the thought of a cup of coffee made me gag and I’m a full on coffee addict usually. Since the hardest part is the wretched withdrawal headache that continues for about a week after giving it up, it was easy for me to go caffeine-free the rest of my pregnancy. My morning cuppa instead was hot water with lemon, which also helped quell the nausea.

Should I really be eating for two or do I still need to watch my weight?

It's not clear when the term 'eating for two' turned into an excuse for super-sizing your fries or getting cosy with a tub of Ben & Jerry's ice cream. We do now know, that yes, your body needs more calories than before you got pregnant, but not as many as you may think. Generally speaking, if you are carrying one baby in your belly and were at a healthy weight before becoming pregnant, you'll want to aim for a weight gain of about 2 stone to 2 stone 7lbs. That goal weight gain goes up about five pounds if you were underweight and down about five pounds if you were overweight. You'll need to speak to your midwife or doctor about the specifics of how much weight you should be gaining, as it really depends on your personal BMI (body mass index).

During your first trimester your body doesn't actually need any extra calories. The first three months your tiny baby is about the size of a pea, so you're not really eating for two. The second trimester you can expect to add about 300 to 350 calories to your diet, while the third trimester you can add an extra 500 calories per day. Keep in mind, however, those additional calories are not a free pass to sit down with a bag of crisps and a milkshake. Focus on healthy and lean proteins, whole grains, fruits and veg. Remember, the nutrients from whatever you're eating go to your baby so it's even more important to eat healthily.



What are the major food no-nos during pregnancy?

I had such a love/hate relationship with my smart phone during my pregnancy. The temptation to verify the safety of every morsel of food before I put it in my mouth was real. The reality is that there really aren't that many foods you need to avoid, but for someone like me who literally lives on sushi and turkey and brie sandwiches, the "Do Not Eat" list made me rethink my entire diet.

If you learn the general rules of what not to eat during pregnancy it won't feel as though you need to carry a cheat sheet around with you. On the other hand, it's ok if you need a reminder and if you do, there's an app for that! Just a quick visit to your app store, you'll find a number of options to help guide you through the do's and don'ts of pregnancy eating. Here are most of the foods you'll need to say goodbye to for nine months. For a complete list of must-avoid foods, confer with your doctor or midwife.

- **Raw animal of any kind:** Including meat, poultry, shellfish and fish. You'll want to ask for your burgers and steak well-done and avoid undercooked chicken or fish. With any uncooked meats, there's a risk of toxic bacteria, such as salmonella, toxoplasmosis and coliform.
- **Deli meats:** These are off the list due to the risk of listeria contamination. I didn't know anything about listeria until I became pregnant. Since listeria has the potential to cross the placenta and cause miscarriage, you don't want to mess around with deli meats. This was a hard one for me, as it

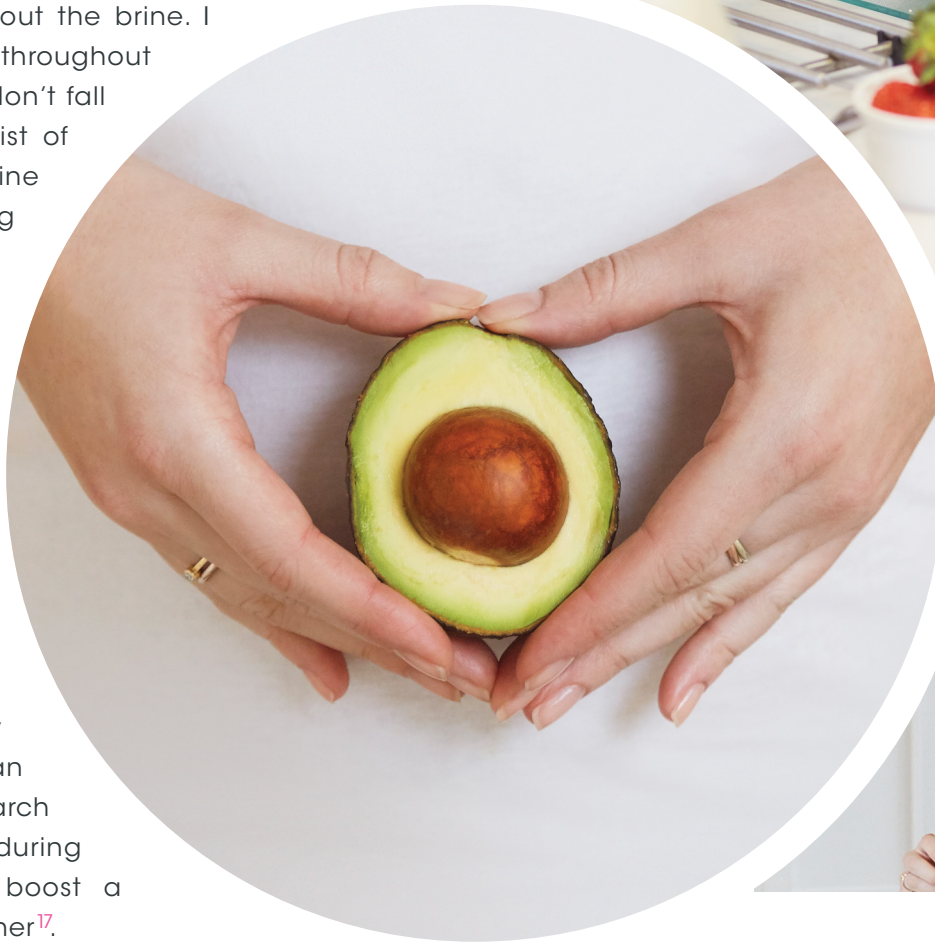
basically meant no sandwiches for nine months, at least not the kind of Italian heroes I was used to, loaded with salami and provolone. I trained myself to eat grilled vegetable sandwiches instead and I also ate a lot of grilled cheese and boat-loads of avocado toast.

- **Raw eggs:** If you're thinking raw cookie batter would be the perfect pregnancy food, you're in for a rude awakening. Raw eggs are a definite no-no. Again, there's the possibility of salmonella exposure. But cookie dough isn't the only raw egg culprit; also cross off homemade Caesar salad dressing, homemade ice cream, mayonnaise and hollandaise sauce. Shop-bought dressings and ice creams are made with pasteurised eggs, so are considered safe. As always, ask your doctor to be sure if in doubt.
- **Soft Cheeses:** Will have to take a back seat during pregnancy. This includes blue cheese, brie, Roquefort, feta and Gorgonzola. The rule of thumb is that unless it's clearly stated they are made from pasteurised milk, soft cheeses are to be avoided.
- **Unwashed vegetables:** Could present a possible hazard thanks to something called toxoplasmosis, which is a disease caused by parasites. If you don't have immunity to this disease, there's potential for it to affect the baby and cause birth defects. The parasites that carry this disease are also commonly found in cat faeces, which is why pregnant women are advised not to change cat litter.
- **More to avoid:** Random foods you may not realise are risky are: pâté, smoked fish and raw (alfalfa, clover and radish) sprouts.

My cravings are making me feel slightly insane (olives and liquorice twists anyone?)

There are no rules about what's normal to crave during pregnancy and what's clinically insane. My cravings were cheese sandwiches and lemonade, which I'm pretty sure I ate every single day for lunch during my first pregnancy. My second pregnancy was all about the brine. I would eat pints of olives and pickles throughout the day. As long as your cravings don't fall under the potentially dangerous list of pregnancy foods, you should be fine and no one will judge you for sticking a spoon in a jar of Nutella.

If you're craving loads of junk foods, it's ok to give in to some of your cravings. Just make sure you're also saving enough room in your belly for the healthy stuff, too. Your addiction to chocolate should only be a supplement to the nutritious foods that are needed to properly nourish your baby. If your pregnancy has left you with a serious sweet tooth, try and head to the fruit rather than the chocolate section. New research shows that eating more fruit during pregnancy could actually help boost a baby's intelligence so it's a no-brainer¹⁷.



Still got a case of the junk food junkies? Here, some delicious alternative healthy snack ideas that will hopefully satiate your cravings:

- Mashed avocados and/or salsa with multi-grain tortilla chips (alternative to nachos)
- Baked potato with yoghurt and chives (alternative to fries)
- Whole grain waffles with peanut butter (alternative to Belgian waffles)
- Whole wheat pitta with houmous (alternative to chips and dip)
- Yogurt and berry smoothie (alternative to milkshake)

I'm struggling to keep my lunch down. What can I eat to help alleviate my nausea?


Think of nausea as an angry beast that comes to pay a visit when your tummy starts to feel empty. The best way to keep that queasy feeling away is by keeping your belly full throughout the day. Your digestive system will slow down with the onset of hormones and can make your stomach feel full, even after a few bites; but when your blood sugar drops or spikes is often when you start to feel nauseous, so it's important to keep balanced blood sugar by eating small meals throughout the day and snacking. Many foods you may have loved before will now smell or taste like something you found on the bottom of your shoe. I consider myself an adventurous eater and fledgling foodie but when nausea took over, I had to succumb to a pretty boring diet of crackers and bananas.

Smelly foods are another offender in the fight against nausea. If you come home to find your house smelling of some exotic new dish your partner has cooked up for dinner, your stomach may not be so happy. Best to stick to blander meals during the morning sickness phase. You could even try to opt for cold meals as opposed to warm ones, which tend to stink up the place more.

You can experiment and see what works for you but to help you on your way here's a list of some of the most common anti-nausea foods:

- Lemons - think lemonade or even sucking on a lemon
- Salty crackers
- Bananas
- Chicken broth
- Apples
- Nuts
- Water



The page is framed by a decorative border of pink line-art illustrations. These include various fruits like apples, lemons, and strawberries, as well as vegetables like carrots, and other elements like water bottles, suns, and leaves. The border is consistent on all four sides of the page.

I want the truth about drinking alcohol during pregnancy. Will one glass of wine do any harm?

Back when my grandma was in her childbearing years, her tipple of choice was a dry Manhattan with three olives. According to my mum, she didn't give up her cocktail habit much while she was pregnant. It wasn't that my grandma was being negligible, she just wasn't aware of the possible effects of alcohol on her unborn baby. This was also back in the Wild West days before babies and children were required to be in car seats. I'll never really know how my grandma's drinking affected my mum (her neurotic personality, perhaps?) but what I do know is that abstaining from alcohol was just something I was committed to during pregnancy.

There's a lot of information about the potential effects of alcohol on the growing baby and none of it is good. Foetal alcohol syndrome can have both debilitating physical and mental side effects on your baby. While there's been much debate about the safety of allowing a bit of drinking during pregnancy, such as an occasional glass of wine, the general consensus in the medical community is that abstinence is the smartest way to go. Why take a chance? As mamas-to-be, we go above and beyond to ensure the safety of

our growing babies. Avoiding sushi and the excruciating amount of medical appointments, a glass of wine or a beer is not worth the risk.

Take it from someone who got married whilst pregnant. I was the only dry one at my own hen party. I had to look on while my tipsy friends cheered on the gyrating stripper who was taking great care with his bumping and grinding so as not to touch my pregnant belly. (A little note to those who are pregnant and engaged, let your friends know you'd much prefer a spa day than a stripper).

If you look forward to your nightly glass of red as a way to unwind, then find other ways to relax besides drinking. Whether it's taking a warm bath or creating Pinterest mood boards for your nursery, there are plenty of alternatives for kicking back at the end of the day. Once that healthy baby comes out of your belly, you can pop open the champers.

Do I really need to take these horse pill pregnancy vitamins every day?
They're making me gag.

Sorry my friend, but those prenatal vitamins are actually pretty important. Even if you are eating healthily, prenatal vitamins help to fill in any gaps in your diet. Plus some of the most important vitamins during pregnancy such as folic acid and iron, (which your body needs about double the amount of than it did before) are rather tricky to get enough of in your diet alone.

The question then becomes not if you should take prenatal supplements, but rather how to make them more palatable and less like measures to check your gag reflex?



Here are some tricks I've learned over my two pregnancies for keeping those horse pills down:

- Take the vitamin with juice rather than water.
- Always take the pill after a meal, never on an empty stomach.
- Take a large gulp of liquid so the vitamin basically swims down your throat. Ask your pharmacist if you struggle taking pills.

I think one of the worst parts about some prenatal vitamins is their odour. There must be some rule about prenatal supplements smelling disgusting. If the ones your midwife or doctor has recommended are just too vile to even put near your mouth, ask if there's another brand they can recommend. There are also different forms of prenatal vitamins that you can ask your healthcare provider about, including gummy sweets, chocolates, shakes and even nutrition bars.

Do I need to cut out all fish? I'm worried about mercury levels.

No, in fact fish can be very good for your baby's brain development. It's widely known that the long chain omega-3 fatty acids found in fish, DHA in particular, set the foundation for healthy brain development. Studies have also shown that those omegas are best absorbed by the body via diet as opposed to supplements, so eating fish has some amazing health benefits. It's really just about choosing the right types of fish whilst pregnant.

The fish that should be avoided are mostly the large, predatory fish, which eat smaller fish and live longer, making them more likely to contain higher levels of mercury. These include shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish. Albacore tuna has more mercury than light tuna, so it's advised to limit your intake to 170 grams a week. Other than those restrictions you're encouraged to eat up to 340 grams a week of the lower mercury fish and shellfish, which include prawns, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock and catfish. Just make sure they're cooked!

Is it true that what I eat will affect my baby's sense of taste?

Have you ever wondered how that toddler at your favourite curry restaurant can happily graze on a plate of vindaloo, while the spiciest dish you can handle is the chana saag? Chances are that mama was eating plenty of curry whilst pregnant. A little known fact is that your amniotic fluid is actually flavoured by the foods that mama eats. Pretty cool, right?

Experts say that babies in utero will get exposed to any flavour mama eats and since sense of taste is mostly comprised of smell, your baby is definitely becoming accustomed to whatever you're eating during pregnancy¹⁸. If you eat enough broccoli now, hopefully you won't have to bribe your little one to finish his later.

Should I only be eating organic foods?

As a mama I can be a touch overly protective when it comes to the food I eat and feed my kids. I don't consider myself a helicopter parent, but I can get a little obsessed about what's going in their mouths. As much as humanly possible, I try and stay away from the known nasties, such as high fructose corn syrup and genetically modified ingredients (GMOs). My husband is not a huge fan of my Whole Foods (aka Whole Salary) addiction, but I hope that one day, when we're 103 years old and healthy, he'll thank me.

During pregnancy, I tried as hard as I could to eat mostly organic foods, which meant foods that weren't contaminated by pesticides and were free of chemicals, dyes and synthetic additives. I didn't vet every morsel that went into my mouth but I've done enough research to know the potential harm of not eating organic.

When in doubt you can refer to the Environmental Working Group's "Dirty Dozen" list of the most important foods to purchase organic.

Here are a list of foods worth spending the money on to make sure they're organic:

- Strawberries
- Celery
- Tomatoes
- Apples
- Grapes
- Bell Peppers
- Nectarines
- Cherries
- Cherry Tomatoes
- Peaches
- Spinach
- Cucumbers

*“No one will judge you
for sticking a spoon in
a jar of Nutella”*





Recipes

Because we all need an
alternative if we can't eat brie!

*“Our home-made recipes
will ensure you and your baby
get everything you need”*

Eating healthily when you're pregnant can be difficult: you have some crazy cravings and an even crazier schedule. Plus, the worry of eating all the right things is in the forefront of your mind and it's so important for your growing baby to make sure you're getting lots of nutrients. So let us inspire you with our delicious recipes, which are easy enough to tackle on a weeknight and will satisfy the strangest of pregnancy cravings. You'll feel great knowing that they're packed with plenty of goodness including protein, nutrients, and other benefits for you and your baby. Check out these delicious, nutritionist-approved meals that are quick and easy and will help you stay on track throughout your nine month stretch.

These recipes have been provided by certified nutritionist and Mama Kate Hoban.

Blueberry Superfood Smoothie (serves 1)

Ingredients

- 70g frozen blueberries
- 1 tbsp. Greek yoghurt
- ½ frozen banana
- ½ ripe avocado
- 25g cashew nuts
- 150ml almond milk

Smoothies are an excellent, easy way to get lots of nutrients into your body that will help to nourish your growing baby. They also make a brilliant breakfast choice for mornings when you don't feel like eating.

Simply blitz all the ingredients in a blender until smooth, adding more liquid if necessary to achieve your desired consistency.



Healthy Granola (serves 4)

Often during the first trimester cereal is all you can stomach in a morning, unfortunately most shop bought cereals are laden with sugar and provide little nourishment for you and your baby. This quick and healthy granola recipe not only tastes delicious but is full of goodness too.

Ingredients

- 160g old fashioned rolled oats
- 2 tbsp. melted coconut oil
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 50g mixed nuts chopped
- 20g seeds such as pumpkin or sunflower
- 30g raisins

1. Preheat your oven to 180°C (fan) and put the oats in a mixing bowl.
2. Mix together the melted coconut oil, honey and pour over the oats mixing well to ensure all the oats are covered.
3. Spread the oats out on a baking sheet and bake for 7 minutes.
4. Remove the oats from the oven, stir in the nuts and seeds and return to the oven for a further 7 minutes.
5. Remove the mixture from the oven and leave to cool, once cool stir in the raisins.
6. Serve with milk or Greek yoghurt. Top with blueberries for a superfood boost.



Mexican Quinoa (serves 4)

High in protein, vitamins and minerals this spicy Mexican quinoa dish is an excellent lunch or dinner choice for all trimesters. Including fibre rich beans in your diet can help relieve common pregnancy complaints such as constipation and other digestive troubles. Top with brain boosting avocado for a perfectly balanced meal.

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp. coconut oil
- 400g tin of chopped tomatoes
- 2-3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 fresh red or green chilli (optional)
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 1 red pepper, diced
- 140g quinoa (uncooked weight)
- 250ml vegetable stock or boiling water
- 215g tin of kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 150g tin of sweet corn
- 1 tsp. chilli powder
- ½ tsp. cumin
- ½ tsp. cayenne pepper
- ½ tsp. smoked paprika
- 1 tsp. chili flakes
- 2 tbsp. jalapenos from a jar (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Avocado to serve

1. Heat the oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat, add the onion and fry for 5 minutes or until softened. Add the garlic, fresh chilli and red pepper to the pan and fry for a further 2 minutes.
2. Add the quinoa, water/stock, kidney beans, chopped tomatoes, spices and season with salt and pepper. Bring to the boil then cover with the lid and reduce the heat to a simmer for approximately 20 minutes until the quinoa is cooked (most of the water will be absorbed).
3. Just before the end of cooking time stir through the sweetcorn and jalapenos if using.
4. Serve topped with ½ avocado per person.





Baked Eggs (serves 2)

Every cell in your growing baby's body is made from protein, therefore it makes sense that you need to regularly consume protein to fuel this growth. Eggs are a nutrient powerhouse containing many vitamins and minerals as well as that essential quality protein. With the addition of black beans, vegetables and cheese this makes the perfect balanced pregnancy meal that can be enjoyed anytime of day.

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp. coconut oil
- 1 onion finely diced
- 1 - 2 cloves of garlic minced
- 1 sweet red pepper diced
- 50g mushrooms chopped
- 2 tsp. balsamic vinegar
- 400g tin of chopped tomatoes
- 100ml water
- 1 fresh red or green chili (optional)
- 200g black beans (optional)
- 200g kale, washed with thick stalks removed
- 1/4 ball mozzarella cheese, torn into pieces
- 4 organic free range eggs
- 2 tsp. chili flakes (more or less depending on how spicy you like it)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 avocado (optional)

1. Heat the coconut oil in a large shallow pan on a medium to high heat.
2. Fry your onions in the coconut oil for a couple of minutes before adding the garlic, red pepper and mushrooms then fry for a couple minutes longer.
3. Add the chopped tomatoes, balsamic vinegar, water, the optional ingredients and chilli flakes. Season with salt and pepper then simmer on a low heat for 10 minutes to let the sauce thicken up.
4. Add the kale and mozzarella then cover to let the cheese melt and the kale wilt for around 5 minutes.
5. Push the mixture around to make 4 spaces for the eggs before gently cracking the eggs in, season with salt and pepper and leave to cook until the eggs are cooked to your liking (around 6 minutes with the lid off or 4 with the lid on, to ensure they aren't runny).
6. Serve with a side of mashed avocado (optional).



No Bake Brownies (serves 10)

Ingredients

- 100g almonds (you can substitute for any nuts)
- 100g pitted medjool dates (approximately 6)
- 1 tbsp. melted coconut oil
- 2 tbsp. cacao powder

If you're craving something sweet this is a fantastic recipe you can rustle up in minutes for a chocolatey treat that is free of refined sugars and other nasties. Nuts are a great source of protein and fibre, and the dates will provide you with a quick natural energy boost.

1. Blitz the nuts in a food processor into a flour before adding the dates and blitzing again until combined.
2. Add the melted coconut oil and cacao and continue to blend the mixture until well-combined and there are no large chunks.
3. Line a small baking tray or container with baking paper and add the mixture, press into a rectangular shape.
4. Place in the freezer for 30 minutes – 1 hour to set before removing and slicing into squares.
5. Store in the fridge for whenever those sweet cravings hit.



Kale Crisps

Although vegetable crisps may not sound that appealing, this is definitely a 'don't knock it until you've tried it recipe' as they are arguably more tasty than regular crisps. Dark green leafy veg (kale, spinach, swiss chard, broccoli etc.) is crammed with nutrients including vitamins A, C and K; they are also an excellent source of folate, which helps to prevent spina bifida and other neural tube defects.

Ingredients

- 1 bag of kale washed with thick stalks removed
- Your favourite herbs / spices (chilli flakes, paprika, thyme etc)
- Salt and pepper
- Juice of ½ a lemon
- Parmesan cheese (optional)

1. Preheat your oven to 100°C.
2. Put the kale leaves in a bowl and squeeze on the lemon juice.
3. Season with salt and pepper and add your favourite spices.
4. Grate on some parmesan cheese if using.
5. Place in a single layer on a baking tray (you may need to use more than 1) and bake for 40 minutes to 1 hour until crispy (keep an eye on them so they don't burn).



Style

Style it out,
bump and all!

“Make your pregnancy
a style statement”

Dressing a growing bump can present a challenge to even the most stylish mamas-to-be. Thankfully, fashion designers have wised up and there are so many more clothing options now that help you make your pregnancy a style statement. Maternity fashion is a booming industry, thanks to the droves of women who continue working throughout their pregnancies. We’ve come a long way from spending our nine months knitting baby beanies in a dressing gown whilst waiting for our little one to arrive. You may need to avoid skin tight pants and sky high heels, but there are ways to still feel like a hottie at every price point. And the good news is you don’t need to go out and only buy maternity clothing, regular pieces from your closet can still work as long as you know how to style and size them.

I had to face the ultimate bump fashion challenge during my pregnancy, my own wedding. At five months, I proudly walked down the aisle in an empire waisted number from Vera Wang (and it should be noted this was not a maternity dress). With a little help from a seamstress and some strategic accessories, I was able to still live out my bridal vision in all its glory. I may have been knocked up, but I still knocked it out of the park style-wise. Whether you’ve got fancy cocktail parties to attend, nights out with the ladies, or your own nuptials, you don’t have to let your bump put any limitations on your style.

Where should I shop for maternity wear?

Flashback to even just a decade ago and maternity wear was the general description for the clothing to buy during pregnancy. But nowadays, modern designers have changed their tune to reflect the idea that most women don't want to brand their wardrobe as "maternity" even during the height of their pregnancy. The reality is that the right pieces can discreetly morph into a pregnancy-friendly look and last years beyond giving birth. There are many shops that now sell chic mama-friendly pieces that will take you through pregnancy and then transition nicely back into your lifestyle as a busy mama. Sure, some of these brands are a bit on the pricier side, but you get what you pay for. Paying less for something you'll only wear for six months versus spending more on a look you'll wear for years to come, the choice is up to you and there's no wrong or right.

Here are some of the best shops for mamas, some are strictly maternity while others carry transitional investment pieces:

- **Seraphine Maternity Wear:** Seraphine is a fab one-stop shop for your full maternity wardrobe with its on-trend, high quality pieces that cover you from on-the-go-mama to black tie events. Loved by celebs, they're a favourite with everyone from Hollywood A-Listers like Marion Cotillard to royalty including The Duchess of Cambridge, Seraphine clothes are look great even without the bump and will definitely carry you through post-pregnancy.

- **ASOS:** For relatively affordable fashions, this online retailer does a great job at appealing to the younger set. But you don't have to be in your 20's to appreciate the look of a cool vintage-y rock band tee and distressed boyfriend jeans. Their maternity selection has a mix of skinny jeans, floral dresses and bomber jackets to accommodate a young, or young at heart, mama's growing belly.
- **Nine in the Mirror:** This is where the Vogue editors and international jet set mamas shop for their pregnancy wardrobes. Stocked with top of the moment designers including Alexander Wang, Marni and Iro. Nine in the Mirror is worth perusing for the pregnancy style inspo alone. If you had unlimited funds and an inbox full of glamorous party invitations, this would be the style destination you'd spend hours shopping from.
- **Coggles:** This cool online shopping destination is not specifically for mamas-to-be, but the chic accessories and fashion finds are highly curated and highly fun to shop for. You'll find fashion darlings such as Marc Jacobs and Prada mixed with street style brands like Vans, Superga and J Brand. If you're looking to strike the perfect high/low mix, you've come to the right place.
- **Topshop:** You can count on Topshop for delivering on-trend styles at wallet-friendly prices and their maternity line is no different. Loaded with vintage-y jeans, military-style jackets, chic wrap dresses, and sporty t-shirt dresses, Topshop is the perfect place for stylish mamas who want to flaunt their bumps in fashion forward looks throughout their pregnancy.

How not to look like a frump when pregnant?

There were many days I barely cared what I looked like during my pregnancy and would be happy enough to walk out the door in a slightly wrinkled T-shirt and a pair of clean trousers. This was mostly during my second pregnancy when I had a two-year-old to run after. But whilst pregnant with my first son, I had a lot going on personally and professionally. I was recently engaged, had wedding showers and cake tastings to attend and my first book had just been published. I actually made an effort to look as yummy mummy-ish as possible. This meant I had to get my maternity look sorted and not make some half-arse attempt by wearing pieces that sort of fit me.

There's no reason to keep your bump hidden either. I had some more body-conscious pieces, a form-fitting black dress and a long sleeved bodysuit, that I loved to wear during my pregnancy. Showing off my bump made me feel proud and also let people know I was actually carrying a baby and not just plumper than usual. Here's some of the most stylish, unfrumpy ways to dress your bump:



A classic coat is perfect for a chilly day to keep you and your bump covered from the cold. Plus, teamed with boyfriend jeans, trainers and stripey tee, it looks pretty damn chic.



If you love a rock chick vibe, then you don't need to trade it for a frumpy jumper just because you're pregnant. Throw on a soft leather jacket and some trendy accessories and you can paint the town red (with juice).

Struggling to find an outfit for an event? Finding some chunky-heeled shoes will dress any outfit up as well as keep you stable. A wrap-dress will accentuate your beautiful bump and if it's an evening that could get colder, throwing a leather jacket round your shoulders will give it that bit of edge. Again, adding a cool bag or some statement earrings will finish any outfit off with an oomph.



More style tips:

- Oversized button up shirts are perfect, especially as your belly grows. You can wear them open and layer over a tee too.
- Find t-shirts with a hemline that's higher at the front so it won't be so tight over your bump.
- If you're feeling frumpy go for a little black casual dress and accessorise with a scarf or jewellery and a longline gilet cardigan/jacket can be used as an extra layer.
- Invest in a couple of pairs of maternity jeans/trousers that fit well. Try them on, if you try on in early pregnancy, you may need a size bigger than your usual for them to last.
- Invest in a couple of really comfortable, well fitted, non-underwired maternity bras.
- Horizontal stripes are (for a change) flattering rather than fattening as they accentuate your bump.
- Wrap dresses are great, if you feel you're gaining weight the 'v' neckline will be slimming and the wrap will feel comfortable across your bump. Go as loose or tight as you like.
- For your hospital bag, pack high rise comfortable knickers. If you end up having a caesarean (as I did) you'll need underwear that goes over the stitches.



Do I really need to spend money on a new pregnancy wardrobe?

Going on a maternity wear shopping spree is not essential to dressing your bump. By choosing styles in slightly baggier sizes, flowy, or A-line styles, you can easily get away with not putting any money towards a new wardrobe, unless you want to of course. However, when you become pregnant, there are some other body issues that need tending to besides just your belly. My boobs suddenly became three sizes bigger and many of my former shirts looked ridiculous or just plain raunchy on me.

There's something called a belly band, which is a stretchy piece of fabric that looks like a giant sized headband. You slip it on over your unbuttoned trousers and it holds them up, whilst covering any lumps or bumps. Genius! I absolutely loved my belly band as it extended the life of my trousers and was so comfy to wear.

It was also great for post pregnancy when I wasn't quite ready to wear my old jeans again (thanks to a sensitive C-section scar).

Once you hit the third trimester however, wearing your non-pregnancy trousers even with a belly band becomes virtually impossible. This is when you'll want to spring for a pair or two of designer maternity jeans, or shorts, depending on the season. My favourite maternity jeans were from J Brand. So comfy and chic. Elastic waist pants will also be your best fashion friend. Look for cool joggers or leggings to take you through the last months of pregnancy and into your first few months of mama-hood, which requires comfort, ease and no complicated zippers or buttons to deal with.

“My boobs became three times bigger and my shirts just looked plain raunchy on me!”

What are the best high street style maternity brands?

You can turn almost any high street store into a maternity wear shop if you have the right eye for it. Seek out blousey tops, tunics, overalls and cardigans, which are all stylish and pregnancy-friendly, but not “maternity” specific. I bought much of my pregnancy wardrobe in the regular section at my usual stores, just in a size or two bigger than normal. I hated the idea of spending money on pieces I’d only wear for a few months. In fact I wore a non-maternity cotton T-shirt dress from H&M for the entire summer I was pregnant. Other bump-friendly high street shops worth exploring are Topshop, Uniqlo, H&M and Gap.



Ok I’m ready to splurge a little. What designer maternity wear is worth the money?

Hey there’s nothing wrong with getting a little spendy on your pregnancy style. If you’re ready to have a spending spree, then you won’t be disappointed with designers Isabella Oliver, Monrow, Pietro Brunelli, Seraphine and Hatch Collection. You can also shop online at Tilden, Net A Porter, and Nine in the Mirror for a selection of various high-end designer maternity wear.

What are the best wedding outfits for pregnancy?

Don't let your bump stand in the way of you living out your bridal fantasy. If a spaghetti strap number was always your vision, then go for it. There's no reason maternity has to equate to matronly. I remember on my wedding day, with my bump proudly on display as I walked down the aisle, that it felt so special knowing that our baby was sharing this momentous occasion.

You'll need to decide whether you want to lightly conceal your bump or flaunt your growing belly. To conceal it, an empire waist look is the way to go. You can find basically any style that has an empire waist design. The key is to accentuate the tiniest part of your torso and make the focus on the upper part of the body. Many maternity wedding dresses have a sash or bow detail above the bump area to help achieve this look.

To highlight your bump, look for a dress with a bit of give to it. Find a body conscious dress that has some elasticity with either jersey or a lace stretchy fabric. If you're feeling sexy in your mama-to-be body, then there's no reason to hide it. Also, this might not be the time to wear platform heels or stilettos. A tasteful pair of beautiful flats will make you very happy and can later be worn with a pair of jeans.



Can I wear shapewear whilst pregnant?

You might wonder what the purpose of shapewear is during pregnancy, after all isn't the whole point of wearing it to make you look slimmer? While pregnancy is not the time to wear a girdle and hide your belly, shapewear can come in handy if you want to accentuate your bump while still holding in some of the lumps and bumps on your hips, bum and thighs.

Wearing Lycra, (the fabric that gives shapewear its fit) over your bump won't harm your baby. Since the baby is protected and well cushioned by the amniotic fluid, any mild compression from one of these garments won't be harmful. However, you may not feel comfortable in traditional shapewear. There are maternity-specific shapewear to help mamas not only look less bumpy, but will also provide support to the back and belly.



Can I wear heels whilst pregnant?

If high heels are your calling card, there's no reason to relegate them to the back of your closet during pregnancy. Wearing heels in itself will not harm your baby. The only possible danger is that you could fall and hurt yourself and potentially your baby. During pregnancy, your centre of gravity changes, making you feel a little uneasy on your feet. The further along you get, the more off kilter your centre of gravity will be. So if you're a little clumsy on heels to begin with, pregnancy is probably not the best time to start wearing them.

Your first and second trimester are the best times to sashay around in heels. Once your belly is the size of a watermelon, sticking to flats is recommended.

Even when you're not pregnant, heels can throw off the proper alignment in your body and lead to back pain. Since your back is already being compromised during pregnancy, why make it worse with stilettos?

Also, to note, your shoes may feel generally tighter – I had to go a size up in some shoes. You can keep feet cool in the summer with a foot spa and leg gel massages to help keep swelling down so you can keep wearing your favourite shoes.

Any patterns or styles I should avoid whilst pregnant?

Discovering what looks good on you in maternity wear is very subjective. It's really more about the size and fit than it is about the pattern. Personally, any loud patterns always make me feel a bit like a clown, so I gravitated towards neutral colours without any ornate designs. Monochromatic looks great during pregnancy or mixing different shades of the same colour.

Wearing clothing that's oversized just for the sake of covering your belly is generally a bad idea. You don't want to wear clothing that's swimming on you, which will make you look sloppy as opposed to pregnant. Accentuating the parts of your body that are the most attractive to you, your arms, neckline, or legs, is a good strategy during pregnancy. Strong is the new skinny and well-toned arms peeking out of a sleeveless top whilst you're pregnant shows the world that you're still in control of your body.

Less is more when it comes to accessories. Keep the crazy wide brimmed hats and costume jewellery for when you're ready to play dress up with your daughter. Wear your bump as your proudest accessory and you'll never go wrong in the style department.



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