

Your body changes during pregnancy

Skin – Circulating blood increases in pregnancy, including the tiny vessels below the surface which can give you the “glow” of pregnancy.

Stretch marks – Whether you get stretch marks or not may be related to whether your own mother did – if she did, you probably will too. They are caused by the stretching of the skin in pregnancy and are not necessarily a sign of excess weight gain.

They usually appear in the last half of the pregnancy. They can appear bright red but often fade to light pink or gray. Some, if not most, will disappear during the months following delivery.

Skin pigmentation – Some people get “the mask of pregnancy” which is caused by the hormones of pregnancy. It looks like a darkening of your skin across your nose, cheeks and forehead. It is a common reaction and affects mostly women who are dark haired and fair skinned. It can be aggravated by exposure to sunlight.

Breasts – Your breasts may become tender and sore, and will usually get bigger as they prepare for breastfeeding. Toward the end of the pregnancy it is possible for you to begin leaking the foremilk. If this happens, avoid stimulating the nipples and wear a breast pad inside your bra. Remember to change the pad if it becomes damp or wet.

Linea nigra and linea alba – A line that runs from your navel to your pubic hair that starts as a noticeable white line and darkens with the progressing pregnancy. This disappears several weeks after delivery.

Itching – It is not unusual for pregnant women to have itching over their abdomen, or even over their entire body. Moisturizing usually helps, as well as being well hydrated. If you break out in itchy bumps you may be forming PUPP (pruritic urticaria papules) of pregnancy which happens in 1 out of 150 pregnancies and resolves after delivery. Your provider may prescribe medication if you develop PUPPs – otherwise, don’t get overheated, don’t take long hot showers, be sure to moisturize and drink plenty of fluids.

Hair – During pregnancy you may enjoy wonderful thick hair. However, after you give birth, the hormones of pregnancy that influence the growth of hair during pregnancy are gone and those hairs will now fall out. Within six to 15 months after delivery you will have the same hair as before pregnancy.

Nails – You will notice that your fingernails and toenails grow faster. They may be healthier than before or may be brittle.

Eyes – Your vision can change slightly during pregnancy so don’t change your contacts or glasses during pregnancy – your vision will return to normal after you give birth.

Weight gain – Normal weight gain range is 25-35 pounds – your provider will talk to you if your gain is more or less than this.

Back discomfort – Your spine curves more as the pregnancy progresses and the ligaments supporting your abdomen stretch which can cause backaches. Good posture will help – so will back exercises.

Morning sickness – Is common in the first trimester of pregnancy but some women feel nauseous during different trimesters, or throughout the entire pregnancy. Avoid an empty stomach by eating crackers or ginger snaps before getting out of bed and eat smaller more frequent meals.

Bladder – The changes in hormones and the crowding of the bladder by the uterus makes you need to empty your bladder frequently – often for small amounts. If you develop a fever, have an odor to the urine, or an unusual back pain, you should be evaluated for infection.

Breathing – Your rate of breathing will increase as the pregnancy progresses, which can make you feel short of breath if you are going up steps or walking long distances. Remember – you are not out of shape – you are pregnant! The increase in breaths will also cause you to feel thirsty. If you feel thirsty you are already dehydrated and should drink 6-8 ounces of water which will bring you to “even.” Drinking another 6-8 ounces of water will bring you to a hydrated state.

Walking – your hips will be influenced by Relaxin, a hormone of pregnancy. This hormone relaxes the pelvic girdle but will also influence your knees and ankles, making you more prone to trips and falls. It is also the reason you begin to “waddle” at about your fifth month – don’t worry – after pregnancy these things go away.

Emotions – You may find it hard to control the tears or sometimes control angry outbursts – the fluctuations in hormones can cause you to quickly move from being very happy to being sad or depressed. Sometimes these can worsen from lack of sleep, illness such as colds, or stressors such as work, school, finances, or home. Be prepared to adjust your lifestyle to meet your changing situation, find ways to be comfortable and confident. And when your emotions feel out of control, give yourself time to think things through before reacting. Nurturing support from those around you will help considerably.