



Headaches while pregnant

Headaches are common during the first 3 months of pregnancy.



CAUSES

The causes are not always known. These things may play a part:

- Changes in hormones
- Increase in blood volume
- High blood pressure in pregnancy
- Tension
- Stress
- Being hungry
- Poor eating habits
- Food items that some women are sensitive to. Some examples are:
 - Aged cheeses, such as cheddar
 - Aspartame (the artificial sweetener in NutraSweet)
 - Nuts and peanut butter
 - Soy sauce
 - MSG
 - Onions

Sinus headaches occur more often during pregnancy. That's because hormone levels are higher. The hormones cause the mucous membranes to get stuffed up. It can be different with migraine headaches, though. For some women, these happen less often after the first trimester.

Severe headaches can be one of the signs of preeclampsia if they occur in late pregnancy.



TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Are you more than 20 weeks pregnant? Is the headache severe? Does it come with any of these symptoms?

- Severe swelling in the hands, face, ankles, or feet
- Blurry vision or spots before the eyes
- Feeling dizzy
- Feeling sick to your stomach, throwing up, and severe pain
- Pain in the top right part of your belly

NO
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YES ► **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



With a headache, are these signs of infection present?

- Fever of 100.4°F or higher
- Sore throat or earache
- Swelling, redness, or pus on any skin areas

NO
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YES ► **CALL DOCTOR**



With a headache, do you have any of these signs?

- Rapid weight gain (more than 3 pounds a week in the 2nd trimester or more than 1 pound a week in the 3rd trimester)
- Swelling of the face, hands, ankles, or feet
- Pain in the upper right part of your abdomen

NO
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YES ► **CALL DOCTOR**



USE SELF-CARE



SELF-CARE

- Eat at regular times throughout the day. Don't go hungry for a long time. Also, drink plenty of fluids.
- Rest in a quiet, dark room with your eyes closed.
- Avoid loud noises and crowds. Don't strain your eyes.
- Get plenty of sleep at night. Take naps during the day, if you can.
- Relax. Picture a calm, soothing place. Breathe slowly and deeply.
- Massage the base of your neck with your thumbs. Start under your ears. Work to the middle of the back of your head. Then massage both temples gently.
- Get a foot massage.
- Exercise moderately during pregnancy. That's if your health care provider says it's okay.
- Take a warm bath or shower.
- Which feels better to you: a cold or a warm washcloth? Apply that to the area that aches. Put it on the back or top of the head. This can help sinus headaches the most.
- Keep a food diary. Write down what you eat and when. Notice when your headaches come. If you see a connection, avoid those triggers.
- Ask your health care provider before taking any medicine for pain. That includes acetaminophen. Example: Tylenol. Sometimes, a doctor may need to prescribe a strong pain reliever.
- Do not take ibuprofen. Example: Advil. Do not take naproxen sodium. Example: Aleve. Do not take aspirin.