

Common Conditions of Pregnancy

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In A Teaching Situation:

- * Always check with your pregnant student how she is feeling at the start of each class. Take an interest in any new changes, sensations etc.
- * Encourage her to listen to her body and come out of postures well before she feels tired
- * Encourage her not to do anything that intuitively doesn't feel good (this applies to all students).
- * Movement is usually helpful (rocking, swaying, circling etc.)
- * If anything is painful/uncomfortable...come out of posture and feedback.(This applies to all students).

Pregnancy is a normal healthy event and should be about an optimal state of health, not suffering.

Some women do meet challenges along the way and can experience some less pleasant symptoms during their pregnancy journey.

The following are some of the more common symptoms that women may experience during pregnancy.

(The information given is for your personal awareness in a class situation only and does not consider other aspects that may help e.g. diet, therapeutic support, lifestyle changes etc).

Heartburn

Pregnancy hormones relax and soften muscles of the valve between stomach and esophagus. Pressure on stomach from the growing uterus sometimes allows gastric acid juices to flow upwards to esophagus. Woman experiences burning sensation in her chest. Can be painful with belching and reflux.

- Posture is important,
- Need to be well grounded
- Upright postures with arms extended above head give relief.
- Avoid inverted postures and supine postures (forward bends, dog etc.) if very bad.
- Pranayama good (Ujayi, Nadi Shodhana)
- Virasana and supported Supta Virasana can be helpful.

Backache

Back pain can be the result of postural change and imbalance.

Approximately half of all pregnant women experience lower back pain or Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP). Problems in the Sacro-iliac joints can sometimes result in Sciatica. Changing from lying down/sitting to standing can be uncomfortable as can walking.

Can be caused by:

- Postural changes (pelvis tilts forwards in pregnancy - slightly increasing lordosis)
- Softening of pelvic joints and soft tissue /connective tissue throughout the body.
- Tight psoas
- Increase weight of uterus/baby etc.

Leg Cramps

Cramping mostly in the middle of the night or sometimes brought on by pointing toes. More common in second half of pregnancy. Exact cause is not well understood. No evidence to date that it is due to lack of calcium. May be related to Magnesium deficiency, pressure from growing baby effecting nerves and circulation.

- Gentle warm up of feet/calves is helpful
- Calf stretches: Lunges leaning against wall, Dog, Supine leg stretches.
- Moving gently and gradually into sitting on heels and Child Pose (can set cramping off for some women). May need to use bolster/blocks to raise pelvis.

NOTE: Cramping is **not to be confused with DVT (Deep Vein Thrombosis) – redness, swelling, leg hot to the touch. DVT requires immediate hospitalisation.**

Nausea

Nausea and vomiting typically occur during first 14 weeks of pregnancy. For some women, it can persist for longer. It is often worse during first pregnancies and with twins/multiples. Can be accompanied by exhaustion, salivation, anxiety. Nausea and vomiting themselves are not generally causes for concern unless accompanied by weight loss and dehydration (Hyperemesis). Linked to the production of hormones HCG (Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin) and Relaxin. Can be aggravated by muscle tension, poor posture, tiredness, overload, diet.

- Move slowly especially when coming up to standing
- Inversions can aggravate nausea for some women
- Rest & restful, restorative postures (Child Pose over beanbag etc)
- Pranayama (Viloma, Ujayi,)
- Vocalisation
- Visualisation
- Meditation

Tiredness and Anxiety

Hormonal changes during first trimester can make a woman feel intensely tired. Levels of tiredness can fluctuate throughout pregnancy.

There is a huge amount of work and change happening. The growing baby, hormonal changes, natural changes in circulation and weight gain, emotional fluctuation etc. can all drain energy.

As pregnancy progresses, the metabolism of the body changes. Intense aerobic activity becomes less appropriate. Pregnancy is a time more attuned to slower, mindful activity (YOGA).

Disturbed sleep is common. As the baby and uterus grow it can be harder to get comfortable at night. Women often need to get up a lot in the night to pee due to increased pressure on the bladder. Heartburn, back, hip, rib ache can also cause broken nights.

Some women feel worried and anxious: their baby's well-being, the approaching birth, motherhood, work pressures, relationship issues etc. can start the mind racing. Once awake it can be hard to fall back asleep.

The following are helpful:

- Gentle slow flowing practice
- Restful postures
- Mindful movement
- Pranayama (Ujayi, Viloma, Nadi Shodana, Bramari)
- Yoga Nidra
- Visualisation
- Meditation
- Supported Child Pose, Viparita Karani (legs up wall). NB in late pregnancy some women may be uncomfortable lying on their back.
- Rest, rest, rest! Women often work far too late into their pregnancies thinking that it will give them more time after baby is born. Or often rush around as if nothing is happening/changing in their lives. It is generally counterproductive and can aggravate many of the common symptoms of pregnancy.

NOTE: If a woman is feeling very anxious it is important she speaks to her midwife. She may decide to see a therapist / have counselling. It can be very beneficial for women to look at what comes up emotionally during the months of pregnancy (with appropriate professional support).

Pelvic Girdle Pain (PGP)

Was called Symphysis Pubis Dysfunction.

Symptoms include mild, moderate or severe pain in the pubic bone area as well as pain in the hips, groin, lower abdomen, buttocks, lower back or inner thighs. PGP can be aggravated by the increasing weight and lie of the baby, changes in the body's center of gravity, and posture. As levels of Relaxin increase the mother's pelvis becomes more mobile in readiness for birth. Standing and walking, turning over in bed and movement that involves separating the legs, (walking upstairs, getting in and out of the bath or car), can be painful. Sometimes a clicking sensation can be felt or heard.

- If a woman is experiencing sensitivity around her Symphysis Pubis AVOID anything that can put strain on Symphysis Pubis.
- Wide stride postures (e.g. Upavista Konasana, Prasarita Padottanasana), deep lunges, Malasana, Full Goddess squat, any seated postures with knees open wide (e.g. lotus, Siddhasana , Sukhasana, Baddha Konasana), King Pigeon etc.
- *Some of the above mentioned could be modified by bringing knees higher than hips supporting them with many cushions.*
- Careful with Child Pose: modify it so that woman is resting with torso raised over beanbag with knees as close to each other as is comfortable,
- **NO** one - legged balances, or jerky, jolting movements.
- Virasana can feel comforting, as can Dog.

Always good to check in with woman ask her how she feels. If for any reason she isn't comfortable, she shouldn't be doing it.

Dizziness and Fainting

Feeling faint or dizzy is very common in pregnancy, particularly during the first and second trimesters. It often happens when women stand up too quickly or stand for long periods.

Diastolic blood pressure (the bottom number) usually drops slightly during the first 16-20 weeks of pregnancy. Low pressure can make a woman more prone to fainting. An increase in blood volumes together with blood vessels that become *stretchier*, means blood is more likely to pool in the feet and legs, leaving the brain in short

supply.

Low iron levels can also cause feelings of weakness and dizziness. Low iron levels mean less oxygen is stored in the blood.

In late pregnancy, some women feel faint or dizzy lying on their back, (weight of growing uterus and baby presses down on the Vena Cava).

- Slow easy transitions
- Come up from lying gradually
- Stand up slowly
- If a woman feels light headed or unwell lying on her back, have her lie on to her side / sit upright (slowly).
- Roll up from forward bend very gradually (can also walk hands up legs to come up. Rest en route if dizzy).
- A woman prone to fainting or dizziness my prefer to not stand for too long.

If at any point a woman feels faint/dizzy in class, have her lie down (legs raised if possible), or lie on her side until feelings pass.

Carpal Tunnel

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common condition in pregnancy, affecting up to half of pregnant women. Symptoms include: numbness in the hands, tingling and pain in the thumb, fingers and wrists of one or both hands and occasionally, reduced manual dexterity. Symptoms are usually worse at night. It is caused by compression of the Median nerve as it passes through the Carpal Tunnel. This is caused by fluid retention brought about through hormonal changes.

- Gentle wrist and hand stretches
- Use of a wedge to change angle of wrist when weight bearing on hands.
- If very severe weight bear on elbows or soft fist ed hands.

Varicose Veins

It is very common for pregnant women to develop varicose veins during the first trimester. Pregnancy causes increases in hormone levels and blood volume, which in turn cause veins to enlarge. In addition, the growing weight of the baby and uterus creates increased pressure on the veins. Varicose veins due to pregnancy often improve within 3 months after delivery. However, with successive pregnancies, abnormal veins are more likely to remain. Symptoms include: aching, discomfort and heaviness of the legs, which are usually worse at the end of the day.

- AVOID sitting pelvis directly back on heels. Raise the pelvis by sitting on cushions/blocks, to create space around the backs of the knees.
- AVOID any postures that place pressure on the legs and could be painful. (King Pigeon may need to be modified if uncomfortable).
- Lying on back with legs on the wall is helpful if mother is comfortable.
- Ashtangasana, Dog, Setu Bandha are all helpful working with gravity to release the weight of the uterus away from veins . (less pressure).

Hemorrhoids and Constipation

The hormonal changes of pregnancy make constipation more likely. It can happen at any stage of pregnancy. Later in pregnancy as the uterus enlarges it presses on the bowel and this can also be a contributing factor. Straining when bearing down due to constipation can cause trauma and weakening to the pelvic floor. This can also lead to Hemorrhoids and anal fissures (tears in the skin around the anus) caused when hard stools stretch the sphincter muscle.

- Hemorrhoids - avoid Malasana.
- Exercise the Pelvic Floor
- Dog, Ashtangasana, Setu Bandha, Shoulder balance with feet on the wall are all helpful.
- AVOID straining on the loo. (long soft exhalations are more useful and better support the expulsive reflex).