

itching. In these situations, avoid scratching, take lukewarm showers or baths, and regularly apply a moisturizing cream. Consult your doctor if itching persists or if it appears in other areas of the body.

Varicose veins

During pregnancy, it is common for varicose veins (dilated veins) to develop, usually in the legs, but they may also affect the vaginal area (labia majora). They can be associated with pain, swelling (see below), and a feeling of heaviness, most often at the end of the day. Symptoms usually improve with the following measures: **regular physical exercise** (if not contraindicated); **avoid very hot baths or showers; avoid prolonged sun exposure; avoid crossing your legs when seated; avoid standing still for long periods**; use **compression stockings**; whenever possible, **lie down with your legs slightly elevated**. Consult your doctor if symptoms persist despite these measures.

Involuntary urine leakage (urinary incontinence)

Leaking small amounts of urine is common, especially during the second half of pregnancy. This symptom is almost always temporary and usually disappears within the first few months after childbirth. You can reduce urine leakage by doing **exercises to strengthen pelvic floor muscles** (Kegel exercises). First, you need to identify the muscles involved — the easiest way is to notice which muscles you use to stop the flow of urine. Once identified, perform these exercises three times a day while sitting, lying down, or standing: contract these muscles for 5 seconds, then relax for 5 seconds, repeating this sequence 5 times. Gradually increase to 10 seconds of contraction followed by 10 seconds of relaxation, repeated 10 times. Breathe normally and avoid contracting other muscles during these exercises.

Back pain

Back pain is common, particularly during the second half of pregnancy. Its main cause is enlargement of the uterus, which places additional strain on the muscles and ligaments of the back. It is usually more intense at the end of the day or after a long period of standing, and tends to improve with prolonged rest. In these situations, it is important to: use **low-heeled shoes**; **avoid lifting heavy objects; avoid bending forward to reach the floor**, bending your knees instead. If back pain becomes frequent or bothersome, you may find relief through: **water-based exercise; back massages; applying heat to the area** (with a hot water bottle); **pregnancy girdles** with abdominal and lower-back support. If pain persists despite these measures, consult your doctor.

Abdominal and pelvic pain

Uterine enlargement and compression of surrounding structures can cause occasional abdominal pain, similar to intestinal cramps. Pregnancy hormones also affect pelvic joints, which may lead to pain during movement. These are usually short-lasting symptoms, but if they become bothersome, you may take a 1g tablet of paracetamol (over-the-counter medication) to alleviate them. Consult your doctor if pain becomes strong, persistent or rhythmic in nature.

Oedema (swelling)

In the second half of pregnancy, it is common for the **feet** to swell, and the same may also occur with your **hands** and **face**. In these situations: **avoid standing still for long periods**; do **regular physical exercise** (if not contraindicated); whenever possible, **lie down with your legs slightly elevated**. You may also consider using elastic compression stockings. If you start to feel your fingers swelling, remove your rings.



UNIDADE LOCAL DE SAÚDE
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BODY CHANGES AND COMMON DISCOMFORTS DURING PREGNANCY

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Nausea and vomiting

Nausea is common, especially in early pregnancy, and may or may not be associated with vomiting. It occurs predominantly in the morning, and in most pregnant women resolves spontaneously around 13–16 weeks gestation. Symptoms generally improve with: **frequent meals** (6 or more per day), eating **small amounts of solid food at each meal**, lightly seasoned and well chewed; eating a **plain cracker first thing in the morning** before getting out of bed; eating foods containing **ginger**; **avoiding strong smells**. Consult your doctor if nausea becomes troublesome or vomiting becomes very frequent.

Fatigue

It is common for pregnant women to experience some fatigue and a lack of energy, particularly during the first half of pregnancy. Consult your doctor if the fatigue is severe.

Sleep disturbances

Sleep disturbances are common and may include: **increased sleepiness** (more common in early pregnancy); **waking up frequently during the night** (due to increased urinary frequency, leg cramps, etc.); **snoring** (more common later in pregnancy); **intense dreams**; **insomnia**. These symptoms generally improve with the following measures: maintain a **regular bedtime and wake-up time**; **limit daytime naps** to a maximum of one hour after lunch; engage in **regular physical activity** in the morning or afternoon (if not contraindicated); **limit coffee consumption to the morning or early afternoon**; **avoid drinking large amounts of fluids after 6:00 p.m.**; eat a **light dinner**; **sleep on your side**, if necessary with a pillow under your abdomen; take a warm bath in the late afternoon or before bedtime. You may also try meditation or other relaxation techniques.

Increased saliva production and bleeding gums

Pregnant women may produce more saliva than usual, and this is rarely bothersome, but it may be relieved by eating frequently small amounts of food, including plain crackers, dried fruit, or sugar-free sweets. Bleeding gums are also common. It is important to maintain good oral hygiene and use a soft-bristled toothbrush. Consult your doctor or dentist if bleeding becomes heavy or prolonged.

Increased breast tenderness

Pregnancy hormones cause breast enlargement and may increase breast tenderness. Adapt your bras to accommodate the increase in breast size (which may be up to two sizes above the usual) and choose wider straps for better support.

Increased urinary frequency

As the uterus grows, it reduces the bladder's capacity to expand, and as a result increased urinary frequency is common, especially during the first trimester and in the final weeks of pregnancy, when the baby's head descends into the mother's pelvis. If urinary frequency increases substantially over one or two days, especially when associated with burning during voiding, or lower abdominal pain afterwards, consult your doctor.

Vaginal discharge

Increase in vaginal discharge is common during pregnancy, particularly during the final weeks. Do not use vaginal douches. **Wash daily with water and mild soap**, and preferably wear **cotton underwear**. It is important to distinguish vaginal discharge from a sudden and abundant loss of fluid, which may indicate that the amniotic sac has ruptured. In the latter situation, you should contact “*linha SNS24*”. Consult your doctor if the vaginal discharge is associated with local **burning, itching**, or has a very unpleasant smell.



Heartburn

You may experience a burning sensation in your chest between the stomach and the neck, particularly during the second half of pregnancy. This is caused by the reflux of acid stomach contents into the oesophagus and sometimes into the mouth. If you experience heartburn, the following usually alleviate the discomfort: eat **6 or more meals per day**, consuming **small amounts of food** at each meal; **chew food well**; **avoid fatty or very seasoned foods** (including fried foods and those with rich sauces); **avoid carbonated (fizzy) drinks, citrus fruits, tea, coffee, and chocolate**; **do not lie down immediately after meals**; if necessary, sleep with the **head of the bed slightly raised** (using extra pillows); avoid bending over after meals. If symptoms persist, consult your doctor.

Constipation

Difficulty in emptying the bowels is frequent during pregnancy. To help prevent this situation : **drink plenty of water**; engage in **regular physical exercise** (when not contraindicated); **eat regularly vegetables, high-fibre fruits** (such as apples, pears, peaches, mangoes, and kiwis), and **fibre-rich cereals**. If symptoms persist, consult your doctor.



Haemorrhoids and anal fissures

Haemorrhoids and small anal fissures occur frequently during pregnancy. They are usually caused by constipation and reduced venous drainage due to the enlarged uterus. Symptoms may include: anal itching and pain, local swelling, and bleeding after bowel movements. Recommended measures include: **avoiding constipation** (please see above); **washing the area with cold water** for symptom relief; **careful cleaning and drying the area** after bowel movements; **applying anti-haemorrhoid cream** (over-the-counter medication). Consult your doctor if symptoms persist.

Skin changes

Several skin changes can occur during pregnancy, including: **spider veins** (telangiectasia); **reddening of the palms** (palmar erythema); **dark pigmentation of the face** (chloasma); **darkening of the nipples**, of the **midline zone below the navel** (linea nigra) and of the **external genitalia**. All these changes generally disappear after pregnancy. Spider veins usually decrease in size, and when they remain prominent, they can subsequently be treated.

Leg cramps

Leg cramps are intense and involuntary muscle contractions, most commonly affecting the legs and occurring more frequently during the second half of pregnancy. When a cramp occurs, **keep the foot and toes flexed upwards** until the pain subsides. Afterwards, ask someone to **massage the area** or **apply heat** to it. If cramps become very frequent or bothersome, consult your doctor.

Stretch marks (abdomen, breasts, and thighs)

As these areas enlarge, deeper layers of the skin may become stretched and tear, resulting in more or less parallel stretch marks. These usually start by having a reddish colour and gradually fade over time to become lighter and more greyish. Some women are more prone to stretch marks than others. To reduce the risk of getting stretch marks, avoid gaining more than the recommended weight during pregnancy. None of the existing commercially available creams have been shown to prevent stretch marks, but application of a hydration cream is recommended. After pregnancy, if your stretch marks are of significant cosmetic concern, consider consulting a Dermatologist

Itching on the abdomen

Stretching of the abdominal skin can cause it to become thinner and drier, sometimes leading to