

BRACE  
YOURSELF  
FOR...

# Pregnancy Shockers

Heartburn? Normal. Sudden aversions? They happen. We asked new moms to spill the truths that expecting moms rarely expect.

BY CHRISTINA VERCELLETTO

● **“I count the hours until I can crawl back to bed.”**

Sleepiness is a hallmark of the first trimester. Hormonally, soaring levels of progesterone contribute to daytime drowsiness. Emotionally, thoughts about becoming a mom might keep you up at night. It's a double whammy that can hit first-timers particularly hard, says Soha Elgharib, M.D., an ob-gyn at Torrance Memorial Medical Center in Torrance, California. While nothing can be done about the hormone factor (other than sneaking naps), you can perhaps slow your racing thoughts. Dr. Elgharib suggests getting some exercise,

sticking to a regular bedtime, and laying on your left side, which can improve blood flow.

● **“I sneeze all the time!”**

Crazy but true: About a third of pregnant women have some degree of pregnancy rhinitis, causing nasal congestion, itching, or sneezing, says Neil L. Kao, M.D., of the Allergic Disease and Asthma Center in Greenville, South Carolina. As pregnancy wears on, it tends to increase. “You retain more fluid, and that means swelling everywhere, even inside your nose,” he explains. It usually goes away after the baby is born, but you never know. “Some

immunologic changes may persist,” says Dr. Kao. The best you can do to lessen rhinitis is reduce exposure to allergens like dust mites, pollen, and dander whenever you can.

● **“Burps make me feel like a fire-breathing dragon.”**

“I see increased heartburn with pregnant patients, especially during the second and third trimesters,” notes James Lee, M.D., a gastroenterologist at St. Joseph Hospital of Orange, California. “It's due in part to hormonal changes, which loosen the lower esophageal sphincter, allowing the acidic gastric contents to reflux back into the



Things get weird when another being takes over your body!

esophagus.” Another factor is your growing baby; your enlarging uterus limits the space for your stomach to expand after meals, forcing gastric contents back up. To get some relief, eat small, frequent meals; go light on chocolate, peppermint, caffeine, citrus, and tomato sauce; and stay up at least three hours after your last meal. Exercise may also help, says Dr. Lee.

● **“Just the smell of coffee makes me sick.”**

Some pregnant women are repelled by certain smells and foods they used to enjoy. Elevated hormonal levels are probably to blame, explains Jill Maura Rabin, M.D., an ob-gyn professor at The Hofstra North Shore LIJ School of Medicine in New Hyde Park, New York. It can also be an extension of pregnancy nausea. But maybe the weirdest (and best) fact? As soon as you give birth, you’ll likely go back to loving whatever is now turning you off! So get your latte order ready!



Pregnancy hormones turn your body topsy-turvy!

● **“I’m surprised by my intense cravings for certain foods.”**

“There are many theories about why pregnancy cravings occur, but no one is able to explain them for certain,” says Dr. Rabin. The prevailing theory is that they may be your body’s way of sending a message about what it needs. The classic “pickles and ice cream” craving may be a signal that you need sodium and calcium, she says. But wanting a brownie may be just you hunting a sugar rush!

● **“My gums are bleeding.”**

The increase in estrogen and progesterone makes gum tissue more sensitive to plaque, which can cause gingivitis (red, swollen, tender gums that are more likely to bleed), explains New York City cosmetic dentist Brian Kantor, D.D.S. Pregnancy gingivitis generally shows up during the second or third month, and if you already had gingivitis, it’ll probably get worse. The best defense is good oral hygiene: Brush twice a day for two minutes each time, floss, and schedule appointments with your dentist for regular cleanings.

● **“Constipation! I’ve never had it until now.”**

It happens to more than half of pregnant women, says Dr. Lee. It’s due to an increased progesterone level, which affects your intestinal muscles, and because of the increased pressure on your rectum from your growing baby. Iron supplements can also be a culprit, adds Dr. Lee. He suggests increasing your fluid and fiber intake, along with exercise.

## Help for Hairy Issues

Whether your hair is flaky, wavy, or seemingly everywhere, Jody Levine, M.D., a dermatologist in New York City, has a plan for you.

**“I’M SPROUTING HAIR EVERYWHERE.”**

One reader says she felt like Big Foot! What’s up? “Hair grows faster and falls out less during pregnancy, thanks to estrogen and androgen that prolong the growth phase,” says Dr. Levine. It’s safe to tweeze, wax, or shave, but don’t use bleaches or depilatories, which could be absorbed

into the bloodstream. Six months after delivery, unwanted hair will be gone.

**“MY HAIR’S GONE WAVY.”**

Hormones can change so much about your body, including your hair’s texture. When you’re pregnant, “new hair follicles can grow back a different shape, or drier,

or oilier,” Dr. Levine says. Hair normally goes back to its pre-pregnancy state within six months, but like so many other aspects of your mommy body, long-lasting or permanent changes are possible.

**“SUDDEN DANDRUFF IS STRESSING ME OUT.”**

Blame those higher levels of hormones (again) for

a dry, irritated scalp. Not all over-the-counter dandruff products are safe, though, so talk to your doctor about treatment. If you’re in your first trimester, you may want to wait out the flakes. “Dandruff is often worst in the first trimester, then gets better,” explains Dr. Levine. Phew!

● **“I feel like I’m overproducing saliva.”**

“Pregnancy hormones can affect nearly every aspect of a woman’s body, including her mouth,” observes Dr. Kantor. He’s had patients who complain of too much saliva. In fact, this drooling can be an early sign of pregnancy that your dentist may be the first to pick up on! “This condition pops up early but usually disappears by the end of the first trimester,” notes Dr. Kantor.

● **“Hemorrhoids are here.”**

Varicose veins of the rectum can be par for the second-trimester course. Thank your enlarging uterus and the increased blood flow to the pelvic area. Safe remedies include suppositories and warm sitz baths. They’ll shrink after pregnancy, though they may get worse before they get better. “A vaginal delivery often aggravates them,” says Dr. Lee.

● **“I don’t want sex. At all.”**

Changing hormones (what else?) can cause a drop (or a boost) in your sex drive. It’s luck of the draw, says Dr. Elgharib. Just enjoy time with your partner. Go out for dinner without having to hire a sitter! Desire may return as quickly as it went. **FP**

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