

A Partner's Guide to Pregnancy

Frequently Asked Questions

Overview

How can I support my partner during pregnancy?

You can be supportive by educating yourself about pregnancy, going with your partner to [prenatal care](#) appointments, and making healthy lifestyle choices. You can also help your partner during labor and delivery and continue to be supportive after the baby is born.

Why is it important to be supportive during my partner's pregnancy?

If you're involved and supportive, your partner may be less anxious and have less stress in the weeks after childbirth. Your partner may also be more likely to make healthy lifestyle choices, such as quitting smoking.

Your baby may also be born healthier. Research shows there may be lower rates of [preterm](#) birth and growth problems in babies born to mothers with supportive partners.

Understanding Pregnancy

How long does pregnancy last?

A normal pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks from the first day of the [last menstrual period \(LMP\)](#). Weeks of pregnancy are divided into three trimesters. Each trimester lasts about

3 months.

How is the due date estimated?

The estimated date that the baby will be born is called the estimated due date. This date is based on the LMP or an [ultrasound exam](#). The LMP and ultrasound dating methods are often used together to estimate the due date. Keep in mind that only 1 in 20 women actually give birth on their estimated due date.

What happens during the first trimester of pregnancy?

During the first trimester (the first 13 weeks), your partner may need more rest than usual. Symptoms of nausea and vomiting are also common. These symptoms are known as [morning sickness](#), but they can occur at any time during the day or night.

Early pregnancy can be an emotional time. Mood swings are common. It is not unusual for both partners to have ups and downs. Pregnancy and parenthood are huge life changes, and it can take time for you to adjust. Listen to your partner and offer support.

What happens during the second trimester of pregnancy?

The second trimester of pregnancy (weeks 14 to 27) may be the time your partner feels the best. Energy levels usually improve, and morning sickness usually goes away.

As your partner's belly grows, the pregnancy becomes more obvious. Your partner may start to feel the [fetus](#) move. This typically happens at about 20 weeks of pregnancy, but it can happen earlier or later.

Many couples take childbirth classes at the hospital where they plan to have the baby. Classes are a great way to learn what to expect during labor and delivery and how to support your partner during childbirth. You can also meet and talk with other expecting parents.

What happens during the third trimester of pregnancy?

The last trimester (weeks 28 to 40) is usually the most uncomfortable for your partner. It can also be a very busy time as you prepare for the baby.

Your partner may feel discomfort as the pregnancy grows larger and your partner's body gets ready for the birth. Your partner may have trouble sleeping, walking quickly, and doing routine tasks. It's normal for both of you to feel excited and nervous.

Health During Pregnancy

What can I expect at prenatal care visits?

At each prenatal care visit, the [obstetrician–gynecologist \(ob-gyn\)](#) checks to make sure all is well with your partner and the pregnancy. Ultrasound exams may be done to confirm pregnancy and to check how the pregnancy is developing. You and your partner may choose to

- have tests for [genetic disorders](#)
- find out the sex of the fetus

The first prenatal care visit is usually the longest. There are [routine tests](#) for several infections and health conditions. At a later visit, your partner may have a blood test for [gestational diabetes](#).

Visits may become more frequent as the due date approaches. Your partner may have more tests. The ob-gyn may try to estimate the weight of the fetus and find out the fetus's position in the [uterus](#) in preparation for birth. A vaginal exam may be done to see if your partner is nearing labor.

What lifestyle changes should my partner and I make during pregnancy?

Your partner should make health a top priority during pregnancy, and you can be supportive by doing this too. Eat [healthy meals](#) together. Help your partner get plenty of rest. Try to make sure you both [get enough sleep](#).

[Exercise during pregnancy](#) is also important. It promotes healthy weight gain, lowers risk of certain [complications](#), and may help with some of the aches and pains of pregnancy.

It's especially important for your partner to avoid harmful substances such as smoking, alcohol, and illegal drugs. No amount of alcohol is considered safe during pregnancy.

Illegal drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines, and prescription drugs used for a nonmedical reason, are not safe either. And although marijuana is legal in some states, its use is not recommended during pregnancy. Read [Tobacco, Alcohol, Drugs, and Pregnancy](#) to learn more and find help.

Do I need to quit smoking if my partner is pregnant?

Yes, you and your partner should both avoid smoking. Smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of fetal growth problems and preterm birth. Secondhand smoke is also harmful.

Breathing secondhand smoke during pregnancy increases the risk of having a low-birth-weight baby. Infants and children who are around secondhand smoke have higher rates of asthma attacks, respiratory infections, ear infections, and [sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\)](#) than those who are not. For all of these reasons, smoking should not be allowed in your home or car.

Is it safe to have sex during pregnancy?

Unless your partner's ob-gyn has said otherwise, you can have sex throughout pregnancy. You may need to try new positions as your partner's belly grows. Also, keep in mind that sex may be uncomfortable at times for your partner. Talk with your partner about whether they want to have sex, and if they do, what feels most comfortable.

Getting Ready for Labor and Delivery

How can I help prepare for labor and delivery?

There is plenty you can do to help make labor and delivery go as smoothly as possible:

- Tour the hospital. Ask about the hospital's policies on who can be in the room during labor and delivery, whether you can stay overnight in the room, and if you can take photos or videos of the birth. Also ask about parking areas at the hospital and where to check in.
- Install a rear-facing car seat. You cannot take your baby home unless you have an infant car seat. Get a rear-facing car seat well before the due date and make sure it is installed correctly. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers [tips on choosing and installing the car seat](#) that is best for your baby.

- Get vaccinated. If it's flu season (October to May), get a flu shot. Everyone 6 months and older should get the flu vaccine each year. You also need a dose of the [tetanus toxoid, reduced diphtheria toxoid, and acellular pertussis \(Tdap\)](#) vaccine at least 2 weeks before the baby is born, if you have not already had the Tdap vaccine. And you and your partner should be up-to-date on your [COVID-19 vaccines](#).

How can I help my partner during labor and delivery?

Talk with your partner ahead of time about how you can help during labor and delivery. It's helpful for there to be a trained support person with your partner throughout the whole labor and delivery. This person can be you, or it can be a friend, family member, or a professional labor coach called a [doula](#).

The support person can give physical and emotional support to your partner alongside the hospital staff. This can lead to a better birth experience.

How can I help my partner during early labor?

During early labor, you can help by

- taking walks with your partner
- doing relaxation and breathing techniques together
- distracting your partner by playing cards or other games
- massaging your partner's back and shoulders
- timing your partner's contractions (how long they last and how far apart they are)
- placing a heating pad or ice pack on your partner's lower back
- making phone calls with your partner
- making sure you have everything you need for the hospital
- making sure you have arranged for child care and pet care, if needed

How can I help my partner during active labor?

During active labor, pain will grow stronger. You can help by

- applying firm pressure on the lower back

- massaging the lower back with your knuckles or a tennis ball
- flexing the feet to help relieve leg cramps
- acting as a focal point during contractions
- offering comfort and words of support
- offering small amounts of clear liquids

How can I help my partner during delivery?

For some birth positions, you can give physical support. For squatting positions, your partner may need to lean on or hold onto you for balance. If your partner is lying on their back, you can support one of their legs.

Your partner may ask you to be hands off, and that's OK too. Offering words of support can also be a big help.

What should I know about cesarean birth?

Sometimes babies are born by [cesarean delivery](#). A cesarean delivery is major surgery. Although some are planned, many are unexpected. If your partner has a cesarean delivery, the recovery time is usually longer than a vaginal delivery. Talk with your partner about how you can help during and after a cesarean.

After the Baby is Born

When can we take our baby home from the hospital?

After the baby is born, you and your family can most likely go home in 1 to 2 days. If your partner had a cesarean delivery, the hospital stay may be longer.

What will the weeks after childbirth be like?

The weeks and months after birth are called the [postpartum](#) period. Your partner's body will go through dramatic changes as their body [recovers from the physical stress of birth](#) and adjusts to caring for a newborn.

Though your body is not changing, you will need to adjust to caring for the baby too. This can be a difficult time for both partners.

What is postpartum depression?

It is very common for new parents to feel sad, upset, or anxious after childbirth. Many have mild feelings of sadness called postpartum blues or “baby blues.” When these feelings are more extreme or last longer than a week or two, it may be a sign of a more serious condition known as [postpartum depression](#).

Often, parents with [postpartum depression](#) are not aware they are depressed. It is their partners who first notice the signs and symptoms. People with depression may

- feel anxious or worried for no clear reason
- feel sad, scared, or panicky
- feel so unhappy that they can't sleep
- cry a lot
- have thoughts of harming themselves or the baby

What is postpartum anxiety?

Anxiety disorders often start after pregnancy alongside depression. Anxiety is a feeling of nervousness, worry, or concern. An anxiety disorder is a mental health condition that can get in the way of daily life. The anxiety may be intense or last a long time.

People with anxiety disorders may feel constant worry, tension, and a feeling of doom. They may have trouble sleeping, a rapid heartbeat, dizziness, chest or stomach pains, headaches, or nausea. Read [Anxiety and Pregnancy](#) to learn more.

What if I think my partner has postpartum depression or anxiety?

If your partner shows any warning signs, talk together about your concerns. Listen to support your partner. Help your partner get professional help if needed. Like other health conditions, depression and anxiety can be treated. This may include talk therapy and sometimes medication.

You should also be aware that all new parents can have postpartum depression and anxiety, not just the parent who gave birth. Talk with a health care professional if you have any of the signs.

How can I feel involved if my partner is breastfeeding?

Some partners feel left out when watching the closeness of breastfeeding. But if your partner has chosen to breastfeed, there are ways you can share in these moments:

- Bring the baby to your partner for feedings.
- Burp and change the baby afterward.
- Cuddle and rock the baby to sleep.
- Help feed your baby if your partner pumps breast milk into a bottle.

When is it OK to have sex again after the baby is born?

There is no set time for when you and your partner can start having sex again. Many ob-gyns recommend waiting until 6 weeks after childbirth.

What else should I know about sex after pregnancy?

Talk with your partner about starting a reliable birth control method right after the baby is born. It's possible for your partner to get pregnant very soon after having a baby if you have sex and don't use birth control.

It's normal for new parents to not have much interest in sex, even several months after childbirth. When you both feel ready to have sex again, using water-based lubricant and trying different positions can be helpful. If sex with penetration isn't comfortable, try other types of sexual activity.

If you or your partner have concerns about your sex life, talk about your feelings together. Health care professionals can also help.

Should I take parental leave?

Your job may offer parental leave after the baby is born to allow you to support your baby and partner. If you are able to take time off, it is a good idea to do so. Studies show

that taking leave from work has benefits for all members of the family.

Glossary

Cesarean Delivery: Delivery of a fetus from the uterus through an incision (cut) made in the woman's abdomen.

Complications: Diseases or conditions that happen as a result of another disease or condition. An example is pneumonia that occurs as a result of the flu. A complication also can occur as a result of a condition, such as pregnancy. An example of a pregnancy complication is preterm labor.

Doula: A birth coach who gives continual emotional and physical support to a woman during labor and childbirth.

Fetus: The stage of human development beyond 8 completed weeks after fertilization.

Gestational Diabetes: Diabetes that starts during pregnancy.

Last Menstrual Period (LMP): The date of the first day of the last menstrual period before pregnancy. The LMP is used to estimate the date of delivery.

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with special training and education in women's health.

Postpartum: Related to the weeks following the birth of a child.

Postpartum Depression: A type of depressive mood disorder that develops in the first year after the birth of a child. This type of depression can affect a woman's ability to take care of her child.

Prenatal Care: A program of care for a pregnant woman before the birth of her baby.

Preterm: Less than 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS): The unexpected death of an infant in which the cause is unknown.

Tetanus Toxoid, Reduced Diphtheria Toxoid, and Acellular Pertussis (Tdap) Vaccine: A shot that protects against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (whooping cough).

Ultrasound Exam: A test in which sound waves are used to examine inner parts of the body. During pregnancy, ultrasound can be used to check the fetus.

Uterus: A muscular organ in the female pelvis. During pregnancy, this organ holds and nourishes the fetus. Also called the womb.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

FAQ032

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