

MORNING SICKNESS

This topic is covered in most childbirth-related books, magazines, and newsletters. A look into it from a midwifery perspective seems appropriate.

The origin of the term "morning sickness" is from the fact that during the night a woman's blood sugar drops. Simultaneously, her stomach acids increase due to the longer period of time without food. Upon rising in the morning, she experiences nausea. This condition is, therefore, called morning sickness, however, it may continue throughout the day.

The nausea associated with morning sickness can begin as early as seven to ten days following conception, as the implantation process begins. The placenta embeds itself into the lining of the uterus and the hormonal changes that accompany this may create a feeling of nausea.

Rapid hormonal changes are occurring in the newly pregnant woman. Up until the tenth week the placenta secretes large amounts of the hormone human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG). This hormone is necessary for the continuation of pregnancy. It is also the hormone, which is tested for in pregnancy tests.

Progesterone is responsible for maintaining the uterine lining so implantation may take place. The monthly cycle ceases with the prolonged production of progesterone.

Estrogen, while always present in a woman's body, increases in pregnancy to prepare the mother for nursing.

Nausea and vomiting (morning sickness) are often side effects of these hormonal changes.

Relief through Good Nutrition

During this period of rapid change, good nutrition is essential; otherwise, prolonged nausea and vomiting can easily occur. Expectant mothers are often deficient in the B vitamins, especially B6 (Pyridoxine). White flour and refined sugar both reduce the body's ability to absorb B vitamins. In an attempt to get quick energy, mothers with this deficiency will crave refined sugars, including baked goods and processed foods. The result is a vicious cycle, which further depletes the B vitamins and increases nausea.

Women who have experienced various intensities of morning sickness have reported relief through one or more of the following procedures:

Adding Vitamin B6 to the diet

The most efficient way to implement vitamin B6 into the diet is with foods such as whole grains, meats, green leafy vegetable, lecithin, legumes, nuts, and raisins.

At the same time it is important to note that most multiple B vitamin supplements contain 50 to 100 milligrams of yeast. Yeast growth usually increases during pregnancy, and the additional yeast in the vitamin supplements may cause nausea. Therefore, it may be necessary to use a yeast-free vitamin supplement.

Supplement the diet with choline and inositol, both of which are part of the B complex. Choline and inositol help to reduce cholesterol and aid in the metabolism of fats. A dose of 250 milligrams taken one to three times a day has been found to be helpful.

Beginning each day with light nourishment

Before rising each morning drink a cup of peppermint or spearmint tea to settle the stomach. Then eat several crackers or a piece of whole-grain bread to absorb stomach acid. Within a half hour eat a light breakfast. This process may be repeated throughout the day as needed.

Eating several small meats a day

When you wait too long between meals, the stomach builds up extra amounts of acid, creating nausea. For this reason eat six small meals a day rather than three large ones. The goal is to avoid becoming excessively hungry and thus, nauseous. Therefore, it would be wise to eat before feeling hungry. Ideas for nutritious protein snacks include whole-grain bread with natural peanut butter; nut and raisin trail mixes, sugarless yogurt, and non-processed cheese with whole-wheat crackers.

Drinking plenty of fluids

Dehydration may contribute to further nausea. A suggestion would be to set out a two-quart pitcher of water at the beginning of each day to encourage drinking one glass every hour.

Avoiding sugar

Refined sugar or excessive amounts of natural sugar in honey and fruit juices deplete the B vitamins in the body. Depletion of the B vitamins is one of the key factors in triggering nausea.

When a woman tries to get quick energy from something with sugar in it, she only aggravates the problem. The cycle can be broken only by eating foods high in protein.

Relief through herbs

Herbs can be taken in either in tea or capsule form. Tea is usually less expensive and more effective. Tea is made by pouring one cup of boiling water over a teaspoon of herb and allowing steeping in a covered teapot for five to ten minutes.

Red raspberry leaf: This is high in vitamins E and A, calcium, and iron. It acts as an acid neutralizer to relieve nausea and/or vomiting. It prepares the uterus for labor and helps to prevent miscarriages. Drink a cup three times a day throughout pregnancy.

Peppermint and catnip: Both of these have antispasmodic properties, which produce a relaxing effect on the organs of the digestive system. They bring relief to indigestion, nausea, and vomiting. Drink one cup of tea one-half hour before each meal or before the usual onset of symptoms.

Alfalfa: This is high in calcium and magnesium. It is also a good source of Vitamin K and contains enzymes and amino acids, which are essential for proper digestion. Drink one cup of tea one hour after each meal. Alfalfa may also be taken in tablet form in a dose of three to six tablets daily.

Wild yam root/white poplar bark: These herbs contain properties, which will reduce the incidence of vomiting. Drink one cup of tea with the onset of symptoms.

Morning Sickness Asides

Martha Christy

Researchers at the National Institute of Health found, from the records of 9,000 pregnant women, that expectant mothers who reported vomiting during the first trimester were a little less likely to suffer miscarriages or still births than those who said they didn't vomit. They also had a somewhat lower chance of premature birth.¹

Mark A. Lebanoff, MD, MPH, who led the study, theorized, "Women who experience nausea and vomiting may have higher levels of the needed hormones that are produced during pregnancy."¹

I once suffered a miscarriage at eight weeks and have always suspected some sort of hormone imbalance. I didn't have morning sickness, exhaustion, or tender breasts that had plagued me from conception (?) during my previous pregnancies. As you can imagine, I was delighted with vomiting during a subsequent pregnancy.

Ginger, as an aid for morning sickness, may be quite beneficial. Ginger root has a legendary power of combating nausea; and, "It's quite common today to see people in boats around Hong Kong munching on preserved ginger," according to Albert Leung, a plant pharmacologist.²

A 1982 study, at Brigham Young University and Mount Union College, used seasick-prone people, a whirling chair and placebos, Dramamine, and powdered ginger root (1/2 tsp.). Half of the people taking ginger root were the only ones to last six minutes in the chair (ugh!). A Danish study on 80 "green naval cadets" proved ginger 72% effective against vomiting.

The component in ginger that is effective is unknown; but the researchers feel it interrupts the feedback between the stomach and the nausea center of the brain or affects the inner ear.

Ginger takes effect within 25 minutes and lasts for at least four hours in combating motion sickness. A half-teaspoon of powdered ginger in tea or one teaspoon of fresh grated ginger root (swallowing dry ginger plain may burn the esophagus), two or three 500-mg. capsules, or a 12-ounce can of ginger ale are the recommended amounts for motion sickness.

Ginger may have other useful properties. In animal tests, it lowers blood cholesterol, is an antibiotic (very effective against salmonella), is a strong antioxidant, possibly giving it some anti-cancer properties, and behaves as an anticoagulant. It is designated by the government as "generally recognized as safe" and has few documented side effects.

A well-circulated article by Beverley Roach on using ginger root for morning sickness reports excellent results in treating life-threatening nausea and vomiting suffered by her daughter. Three or four capsules (about 500 mg) were taken upon arising each morning and throughout the day as needed, up to 20 capsules a day. This was continued through the pregnancy with no ill effects.³

And to think I once chided my sister for eating gingersnaps to help her morning sickness. Well...

1. Tufts University Diet and Nutrition Letter, September 1989.
2. The Washington Post, February 28, 1989, "How Ginger Fights Vertigo" by Joan Carper
3. "Ginger Root (Zingiber Officinale) by Beverley Roach, The Birth Gazette, Fall 1989; Vol. 3 No. 1