



## The Lebanese Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology

### Women's health promotion series

#### Morning Sickness

More than 50% of pregnant women vomit and feel nauseous, especially during the first part of pregnancy. This is called “morning sickness” although it could happen anytime of the day. It usually starts at the 6<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy and ends at the 12<sup>th</sup>. Normally, morning sickness does not harm you or your baby's health. However, when nausea and vomiting last for too long or become extreme, they can affect your health. This pamphlet will help you learn more about:

- ✚ When is nausea and vomiting considered normal during pregnancy
- ✚ How nausea and vomiting can be lessened and relieved
- ✚ When medical treatment becomes necessary

#### What Causes Nausea?

A woman's body goes through many changes during pregnancy but no one knows the exact reasons behind nausea and vomiting. However, it is thought that the increasing level of **hormones (substances that control some of your organs' functions)** secreted in your body during pregnancy play a role in causing the nausea and vomiting symptoms.

Some scientists think that nausea and vomiting in pregnancy may be nature's way of protecting the baby – it makes the woman stay away from substances that could be harmful to the pregnancy.

Usually, nausea and vomiting are mild and moderate; they stop after the middle of pregnancy. But some cases can be severe and serious. This condition is called **hyperemesis gravidarum**

(**severe morning sickness**). It can lead to loss of weight (causing malnutrition) and loss of body fluids (causing dehydration).

## Effects on Pregnancy

Most cases of nausea and vomiting are not dangerous on you or your baby's health. Morning sickness is not a sign that your baby is sick. But if you start vomiting most of what you eat or drink and you begin losing weight then you should call your doctor.

## What You Can Do

There is no sure way to prevent these symptoms. However, studies have shown that women who are taking a multivitamin regularly at the time of **conception (fertilization of the female egg)** are less likely to have severe cases of morning sickness.

If you experience morning sickness, there are some things you can do that might help you feel better:

- ✚ When you first wake up, eat a few crackers and then rest for 15 minutes before getting out of bed.
- ✚ Get up slowly and do not lie down right after eating.
- ✚ Eat small meals or snacks often so your stomach does not become empty (for example, every 2 hours). Try not to skip meals.
- ✚ Do not hesitate to eat whatever you feel like eating and eat whenever you want to. However, it is best to avoid cooking or eating spicy, fatty and fried foods.
- ✚ If cooking odors bother you, open the windows and turn on the stove fan. If possible, ask someone else to cook the meals.
- ✚ Try eating cold food instead of hot (cold food may not smell as strong as hot food).
- ✚ Sniffing lemons or ginger can sometimes relieve an upset stomach.
- ✚ Eating salty potato chips can help settle the stomach enough to eat a meal.
- ✚ Drink small amounts of fluids frequently during the day.
- ✚ Avoid drinking fluids during meals and immediately before or after a meal.

- ✦ Get plenty of rest since nausea tends to worsen when a woman is tired. Try napping during the day. Typically, a pregnant woman needs more sleep in the first three months of pregnancy.
- ✦ You may need to take some time off work or make other arrangements for household chores and childcare.
- ✦ Enlist the support of friends and family.
- ✦ Get plenty of fresh air and avoid warm places as feeling hot can add to nausea.
- ✦ Acupressure wrist bands or acupuncture can be beneficial for some women. If you are considering acupuncture, consult your healthcare professional and look for an experienced and licensed acupuncturist.
- ✦ Try ginger, an alternative remedy thought to settle the stomach. Dosages of up to 250 mg four times a day appear to be safe.
- ✦ Try taking your prenatal vitamins (one with a lower amount of iron if that mineral makes your nausea worse) with food or just before bed. If multivitamins make your nausea worse, take folic acid alone on a daily basis.

Talk with your doctor before taking any medication or trying any treatment.

## Medical Treatment

If your nausea and vomiting are severe, you may need medical treatment. Your doctor may suggest vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, doxylamine, or anti-nausea medications. In severe cases, this treatment helps in reducing the number of times a woman vomits. If your doctor suspects that you have hyperemesis gravidarum, you may need to receive fluids through an intravenous (IV) line and stay in the hospital for a while.

## Finally...

During pregnancy your body goes through many changes. Nausea and vomiting are common during the first part of pregnancy. While your body adjusts to these changes, you may find some relief if you follow the tips given here. Call your doctor right away if your nausea and vomiting become severe.

*With the compliments of the Lebanese Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology*

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