Morning, noon, and night sickness

(1) Dear Alice,

Why do women get morning sickness during their pregnancy?

(2) Dear Alice,

During my first pregnancy I had morning sickness ALL DAY for 8 months! Do you have any suggestions on how to avoid the nausea? I have heard (and tried) a lot of "old wives tales" but nothing seems to work...Please help me, as I would like to have another baby but I don't think I can go through that again!!

? Sick of being sick

Answer

Dear Reader and Sick of being sick,

Morning sickness is usually an early pregnancy condition that many, but not all, women experience. For some women who experience it, morning is a serious misnomer ? the nausea and vomiting that define morning sickness come up at any time, day or night. It usually lasts through the first trimester, but for some women, it can last through the entire pregnancy (as Sick of being sick can attest).

The exact cause of morning sickness is unknown, but is generally attributed to the hormonal changes or lower blood sugar that occurs during pregnancy. These hormonal changes slow the digestion process, making it harder to break down certain types of food. Stress, fatigue, traveling, and some foods can make morning sickness worse. Additionally, morning sickness is more common when expecting twins or triplets, women who?ve experienced nausea from migraines, motion sickness, or certain smells or tastes, and those who have had morning sickness in a previous pregnancy. However, the amount of morning sickness from one pregnancy does not necessarily predict morning sickness in future pregnancies.

An obstetrician or midwife will not want to give a pregnant woman any drugs that could have teratogenic effects (ones that could impair normal growth and development of the fetus) so home remedies of diet and lifestyle changes are typically emphasized first. Each woman will find out what helps relieve her symptoms of morning sickness and here are a few tips that Sick of being sick may have already tried:
- Avoid stressful situations, nauseating smells and foods, and cigarette smoke;
- Get plenty of fresh air (take a walk!); and
- Get plenty of sleep.

Bland foods like gelatin, broth, ginger ale, ice pops, and saltine crackers may help soothe a nauseated stomach, whereas foods high in fat and salt may worsen symptoms. Snacking, rather than eating large meals, and drinking plenty of fluids (especially water) throughout the day can reduce nausea. Another tip is to keep a few soda crackers or dry toast by the bed to eat upon waking, before getting out of bed in the morning.

Other recommendations to prevent and treat morning sickness include taking multivitamins or prenatal vitamins at night or with food. Taking 50-100mg per day of Vitamin B6 has been found to be helpful for some women, but women should discuss this with a healthcare provider first. Vitamin B6 could also be increased through the diet by eating whole grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes (peas and beans). Also, talking to other women to learn what worked for them could lead to a new strategy. Though unproven, some people suggest acupressure wristbands, acupuncture, or even hypnosis!

Morning sickness isn?t usually dangerous for a woman or her baby. There is, however, a severe form of morning sickness during pregnancy known as hyperemesis gravidarum [2]. Less than 2% of pregnant women suffer from this condition, which may require hospitalization and treatment with intravenous (IV) fluids and medications. If morning sickness does not improve, nausea and vomiting continue beyond the fourth month, more than two pounds is lost, blood is vomited, or vomiting occurs more than three times a day, it?s best to see a healthcare provider immediately.

It?s difficult when morning sickness impacts a pregnancy experience negatively. Remember that each pregnancy is different, so what happened in one pregnancy may not happen in the next. It might help to focus less on the morning (anytime) sickness and instead think about the joy of welcoming a new person to the world.

Alice!

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