Am I pregnant? [1]

Dear Alice:

Yesterday I suddenly was hit with a feeling of intense weakness. It wasn't a stomachache, but a wave of weakness and nausea. I quickly went to a bathroom. Afterwards, I felt fine, but there was still a feeling of something moving around in my lower stomach (intestines?).

My immediate thought was that it was "morning sickness," a symptom of pregnancy. This seems impossible because I haven't been missing my period. If I did conceive, it could have happened only during last week. Wouldn't it be too early to tell? Also, are there pregnancy tests available at Health Services? If so, for what charge? Is it confidential? Do you recommend the store-bought home tests? When would those become effective (i.e., how many days/weeks after conception would the testing be accurate?)

Thanks a lot,
Anxious

Answer

Dear Anxious,

It's not unusual for the possibility of pregnancy to stir up some anxiety. Taking a store-bought urine pregnancy test is a quick and accurate way to know your pregnancy status and to plan next steps. And while feeling queasy in the morning can certainly be a symptom of pregnancy, nausea and the "moving" feeling in your intestines could also be linked to having a stomach bug, food poisoning, a food sensitivity, or a number of other conditions that aren't related to pregnancy at all. If you're a college student, your student health center may offer pregnancy tests. Costs may vary based on how your school funds its health services and your insurance, and as required by law, the services they provide you would be confidential unless you tell them otherwise. That being said, since it was only last week, it may be too soon to detect on a pregnancy test.
Some people may experience pregnancy-related nausea and vomiting (often called morning sickness) as early as two weeks after conception, but others may not. Keep in mind that early symptoms of pregnancy vary from person to person and pregnancy to pregnancy. Even if some signs point to "yes," you won't know until you take a pregnancy test and find out for sure.

When used correctly, urine pregnancy tests are 99 percent accurate and can help quell your anxiety or allow you to proactively plan out next steps for carrying out or terminating a pregnancy. To ensure accuracy, make sure you read the instructions and follow them as closely as possible. You may also find peace of mind visiting a health care provider to confirm a positive home pregnancy test.

Urine pregnancy tests are most accurate after your period is late, even if the label says it can detect pregnancy prior to a missed period. There’s no harm in taking a pregnancy test at any time. However, be aware that if you haven’t missed your period yet, you’re more likely to get a false positive or negative result, which might cause you some unnecessary stress. If you don’t menstruate or aren’t on a regular cycle, waiting three weeks after sex may produce more accurate home test results.

Pregnancy tests work by detecting a hormone called human chorionic gonadotropin, or hCG. The production of hCG begins when a fertilized egg implants in the uterus (typically around ten days after the egg is fertilized by sperm). It takes time for hCG levels to build up, so taking a pregnancy test right away can lead to an inaccurate result.

You don’t have to go through this alone. If you prefer, you can choose to schedule a pregnancy test with a health care provider. If you have more questions, or you’re not sure how to find a provider, you can visit the Planned Parenthood [2] website for more information about clinics that provide pregnancy testing and can help you navigate your options if you’re pregnant. If you have more questions or as a student, pregnancy testing services aren’t available on campus, you could try to seek services off-campus to access pregnancy testing and assistance with navigating options if you’re pregnant. Associated costs would be dependent on the type of test, and due to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [3], all information shared with a health care provider is confidential unless you give permission for it to be shared with others.

Although it may be a bit early now, taking a home pregnancy test in a few weeks may provide some answers. Even if the result is a surprise, the sooner you find out, the sooner you can learn what options are available to you.

Alice!

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