

Pregnancy the natural way month by month

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Overview

Many patients ask me what to expect during pregnancy and how to maximise their own wellbeing and the health of their unborn child or children. What follows is a month by month explanation of the 9 month path from conception to birth, the associated ailments and how these can be managed and treated in a natural way.

Month 1 (1-4 weeks post last menstrual period date)

Shortly after implantation, the placenta and umbilical cord begin to form. The placenta and umbilical cord provide nourishment and oxygen to the embryo. Until your placenta is fully developed your baby takes nourishment from the yoke sac. The embryo is enclosed in a sac of fluid, called the amniotic sac, which protects your baby from bumps and pressure. In the first 20 days after your last menstrual period the embryo has no heart activity or circulation. By the third week after implantation the baby has a spinal cord but all other organs are still to form. During this time you may experience fatigue and sleepiness, frequent urination, nausea, vomiting, heartburn, indigestion, bloating, food aversions or cravings, and breast changes. These pregnancy symptoms are entirely normal and vary from woman to woman. You may experience all of them, just a few, or none of them. Emotionally, you may feel irritable, have mood swings, may act irrationally, and cry easily. These emotions are like those experienced by women who have premenstrual syndrome. It is also not uncommon to have a variety of feelings about being pregnant, including misgivings, fear, joy, and elation. Many women find chamomile tea very helpful in these early weeks helping to calm and relax the body and facilitate sleeping. Weekly acupuncture to calm the spirit and engender blood is also extremely helpful in smoothing the journey in these early weeks. From the time you know you are pregnant there are many things to consider, firstly keeping alcohol intake to a minimum (one unit per day) and absolutely NO smoking or binge drinking. There are now a huge number of undisputable studies that show smoking and binge alcohol consumption in the first few weeks of pregnancy cause fetal development abnormalities. Consider your lifestyle, I always explain to newly pregnant patients that for the next 12 weeks (until the baby is fully formed) you are a walking incubator and incubators keep everything as constant for the baby as possible. The analogy is not completely accurate, but you see my point. Therefore ideally we want to see everything in your life constant also. Not too much exercise, but some, don't get too cold or too hot, get enough sleep but don't over sleep. There are many more similar aspects which we explain to our patients all of which reduce miscarriage probability. Follow the Food Standards Agency advice on what to eat in pregnancy (the pamphlet PDF can be downloaded from our website).

You also need to stay away from anyone clearly ill and particularly sniffy or coughing children. You can continue your normal level of sexual activity without any risk to your baby whatsoever, but we recommend you use non-lubricated condoms or wear a diaphragm or cap for the duration of pregnancy to minimise the chance of opportunistic bacterial or yeast infections, both of which can cause miscarriage.

There are also some important tests to consider. If you have had more than one miscarriage in the last two years I recommend regular monitoring of Progesterone levels and BhCG levels in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. These two hormones are essential to healthy and ongoing development of an early pregnancy. The maternal Progesterone from the corpus luteum is essential in maintaining the uterine lining and supporting the implantation process. If the level is insufficient then early miscarriages often follow. If your BhCG is insufficient this is an indication of a compromised placenta causing slower development of the fetus and in many cases failure of the pregnancy. Both these conditions can be treated very effectively with natural medicines and acupuncture, but early identification and action is needed.

Month 2 (5-8 weeks)

By the end of week 6 of pregnancy, your baby has a head and body and limb buds. Development of your baby's heart begins at the 5th week of pregnancy and starts beating between week 6 and 7 and is completely formed by the end of week 8. This month is especially critical in the development of your baby. Any disturbance from medications, viruses, or environmental factors such as pesticides, chemicals, radiation may cause birth defects. Your baby's development is very rapid during the second month and all your baby's major body organs and body systems, including the brain, lungs, liver, and stomach are at an advanced stage of development by the end of week 8.

Many women do not feel pregnant during these early weeks. This is common. It is also normal to feel very tired, to urinate often, to feel nausea, to vomit, to have excess saliva, to be constipated, to have heartburn, indigestion, flatulence, or bloating, to experience food aversions or cravings, to feel changes and fullness in your breasts, have occasional headaches and to feel faint or dizzy occasionally. Emotions are likely to be fragile and very similar to the first month of pregnancy. The next consideration is where the pregnancy is developing. The risks of ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the normal position) are 2-3% for natural pregnancies and 4-6% for assisted pregnancies. An early ultrasound scan at between 6 and 7 weeks from your last menstrual period can determine if the baby is alive, how many babies you have, and where they are located in the correct part of your uterus. This can often be arranged at your local hospital maternity department or directly with a private clinic.

Month 3 (10-14 weeks)

Your baby will be completely formed by the end of the third month. Your baby will have begun moving its hands, legs, and head and opening and closing its mouth, but is still too small for you to feel any movement. The fingers and toes are now formed. The baby's hands are also developed. Tooth buds have formed under the baby's gums. Vocal cords develop around the 13th week of pregnancy. Kidneys are now developed and start draining urine into the bladder. Intestines have formed outside of the baby on the umbilical cord (because they can't fit inside the baby). By the end of this month the placenta has now fully taken over production of progesterone. It is helpful by the end of month 3 to have decided which hospital or midwife you want to register with to care for your pregnancy as there are some important things that take place at your 12-week antenatal appointment.

Your health care provider will check your weight; your blood pressure, your urine for sugar and protein, and the size of your growing baby to more accurately date your gestation and determine the most accurate delivery date. Many of the early physical pregnancy symptoms continue during the third month. Nausea can be very effectively treated with acupuncture and you may wish to pursue this with your acupuncturist. Fresh ginger tea infusions also can help calm your stomach. Emotions may continue to switch back and forth between happiness, fear, joy, misgivings and you may still feel somewhat unstable. However, many women begin to experience a welcomed sense of calmness around this time. This is also the right time to consider whether you want to have chromosome abnormality screening. This can be done at your hospital or privately with a nuchal scan and Free BhCG and PAPP A blood test which together are now 97% accurate in calculating the risk of Down (trisomy 21), Edwards (trisomy 18) and Patau's (trisomy 13) chromosome abnormalities. There is also new blood test called a "Harmony Test, or NIPT) which can very accurately detect fetal chromosome abnormalities and fetal gender at from 10 weeks from a maternal blood sample. In addition, usually a routine blood test is taken at this time to check for diabetes risk and to establish your blood group and rhesus status.

Month 4 (15-19 weeks)

Your baby's eyebrows and eyelashes begin to appear in this month. Buds on the side of the head begin to form into the outer ear. The head makes up about half of the baby's size. The baby moves, sleeps, wakes, swallows, and passes urine. You may start to feel a slight fluttering sensation in your lower abdomen. By the end of the fourth month, your baby will be 20 to 25cm long and will weigh about 170g. This is the month that many women start to feel pregnant. Physically, you may still be fatigued, feel constipated, have indigestion, heartburn, flatulence, or bloating, and experience occasional headaches and dizziness. Some of the symptoms you may have had during the first trimester will likely decrease or disappear. Morning sickness should be starting to decrease also. If not then continued acupuncture once per week will be a very effective and safe way to manage this. Week 16 is the earliest time you can request a scan to reliably identify the gender of your baby if you wish to know.

New symptoms that you may experience include: nasal congestion and occasional nosebleeds, ear stuffiness, bleeding gums, increase in your appetite, mild swelling in your ankles, feet, hands, and face, varicose veins in your legs and a slight whitish vaginal discharge, clumsiness, and possibly fetal movement toward the end of the month. You may have none, some, or all of these symptoms. Your emotions are likely to still swing back and forth between joy, apprehension, irritability. Many women feel frustrated and self-conscious about their bodies when they don't fit into their regular clothes but are still too small for maternity clothes.

Month 5 (20-24 weeks)

This is a period of rapid growth for your baby. The internal organs are maturing. Your baby's fingernails have grown to the tips of the fingers. Fat is now being stored beneath your baby's skin. Your baby is also growing muscle and is getting stronger every day. Your baby sleeps and wakes at regular intervals. You will find that your baby is much more active now. She or he turns from side to side and head over heels. At the end of the fifth month, your baby will be about 25-30cm long and will weigh about 450g. You will be experiencing some of the following: fetal movement, increasing whitish vaginal discharge, lower abdomen aching, constipation, heartburn, indigestion, flatulence, or bloating, occasional headaches, faintness, or dizziness, nasal congestion, nosebleeds, ear stuffiness, bleeding gums, hearty appetite, leg cramps, swelling, varicose veins, hemorrhoids, increased heart rate, backache, changes in your skin pigmentation of your abdomen and face. Emotions are probably calming down now, and you are likely to have fewer mood swings and you may still feel irritable and forgetful from time to time. By now your morning sickness should have disappeared completely. This month your hospital, midwife or private Doctor will schedule an anomaly ultrasound scan (between 19 and 21 weeks) to thoroughly check your baby's development and measure growth. This is also the normal time to ask for gender identification if you and your partner wish to know.

Month 6 (25-28 weeks)

Your baby's brain is developing rapidly. A special type of brown fat that keeps your baby warm at birth is forming. Baby girls will develop around 3 million eggs in their ovaries during this month and your baby's bones are becoming solid. By the end of the sixth month, your baby will be around 27 to 36 cm long and will weigh about 700g. You will be feeling a lot more fetal activity as your baby grows larger and stronger, his or her bones become solid, and he or she becomes more active. You are likely to still experience many of the same symptoms as in week 6 and in addition you may also begin to have an itchy abdomen. Emotionally, absent-mindedness, boredom, and anxiety are common during this period of your pregnancy. Women whose blood group is Rh-negative sometimes form Rh-antibodies when carrying a Rh-positive baby. This is more likely during birth, but occasionally happens in late pregnancy. It can cause anemia, and sometimes death, for a Rh-positive baby in a subsequent pregnancy. Giving the mother anti-D after the first birth does reduce the problems but giving anti-D during pregnancy is likely to help as well.

Month 7 (29-33 weeks)

Your baby's eyes can now open and close and can sense light changes. He or she can now hear the outside world quite well over the sound of your heartbeat. The baby exercises by kicking and stretching. By the end of this month, your baby will be approximately 40cm long and weigh about 1kg. You are likely to still be experiencing constipation, heartburn, indigestion, flatulence, and bloating. Your lower abdomen may feel achy as well. Your whitish vaginal discharge is getting increasingly heavy. Other common physical symptoms include leg cramps, backaches, varicose veins, mild swelling, shortness of breath, difficulty sleeping, and clumsiness. You are probably also feeling Braxton Hicks contractions that are usually painless. During a Braxton Hicks contraction, your uterus hardens for a minute and then returns to normal. By this time, women often find themselves feeling bored and a bit weary about their pregnancy. It is normal to feel like you just want this to be over.

Month 8 (34-38 weeks)

Your baby's body continues to grow quickly Taste buds are developing. Your baby may now hiccup, cry and respond to pain, light, and sound. If you are having a boy, his testicles have dropped from his abdomen where they will then descend into his scrotum. Your baby will be about 40 to 45cm long and will weigh about 1.8kg. This is the month that you will be able to determine your baby's presentation. This is diagnosed either by physical examination or by ultrasound. If the baby is breech or transverse then moxa and acupuncture is the kindest treatment to turn your baby into the correct presentation. This is the time to communicate and discuss your birth plan with your midwife including pain management during labor and delivery. You will be feeling strong, regular fetal activity. Many of the discomforts you have been experiencing the last few months with constipation and shortness of breath are becoming more frequent. Braxton Hicks contractions will increase. Eagerness to have the pregnancy over and apprehension about the baby's health and labour and delivery are probably increasing.

Month 9 (39-43 weeks)

Your baby is now gaining about a 250g each week, he or she is getting ready for birth and is settling into the fetal position with its head down against the birth canal, its legs tucked up to its chest with its knees against its nose. The rapid flow of blood through the umbilical cord keeps it taut which prevents tangles. Your baby is also beginning to develop sleeping patterns. The bones of baby's head are soft and flexible to ease the process of delivery through the birth canal. Your baby's lungs are now mature and your baby would survive fine if born a little early. Your baby is now about 50cm long and weighs approximately 2,7 to 4kg and can be born anytime between the 36th and 43rd week of pregnancy. In addition to the pregnancy discomforts you have been feeling the last couple of months; you may have some discomfort and aching in your buttocks and pelvic area, increased backache and heaviness, more difficult sleeping and more frequent and intense Braxton Hicks contractions. Due to the lower position of your baby, it will be easier for you to breathe but you will need to urinate more frequently. Taking Arnica orally from week 36 till 4 weeks after delivery at the



recommended daily dose (RDA) will speed-up your recovery from the trauma and bruising caused by childbirth.

The dose taken is so small that the levels present in breast milk are virtually undetectable and the benefits to speeding healing are well proven. You can also massage your perineum (between your vagina and rectum) with vitamin E (from 2 broken oral Vitamin E gel capsules) daily from week 36 to reduce the probability of tearing or needing an episiotomy (surgical incision). You will likely be feeling more excited, anxious, apprehensive, and relieved that it is almost over. If spontaneous labour is not forthcoming, then you will probably be offered a medical induction with a sweep or breaking your waters, or a drug called oxytocin. Breaking your waters and a cervical sweep are invasive and unpleasant and labour induced with oxytocin progresses unnaturally rapidly and usually resulting in instrument deliveries. Labour induction naturally with acupuncture combined with a single oral dose of castor oil (60 mL) is a very successful natural alternative to medical labour induction. In a recent study of 103 women using this approach to labour induction, 30 of 52 women (57.7%) began active labor compared to 2 of 48 (4.2%) receiving no treatment. When acupuncture and castor oil was successful, 83.3% of the women delivered vaginally without instrument assisted deliveries and none or minor tears only. Finally, remember to pack your bag so that you will be ready when the time comes. You won't be pregnant for very much longer!

Our Female Healthcare Philosophy

At the Women's Natural Health Clinic, we specialise in providing comprehensive natural reproductive, gynaecological, obstetric and general healthcare for females from adolescence to post-menopause. Our approach is to integrate techniques in both oriental and western medical diagnosis to formulate a naturally oriented treatment plan combining acupuncture, herbal medicine, naturopathic medicine, nutritional therapy, exercise and lifestyle. Each treatment plan is tailored specifically to each individual woman maximizing results.

Please email us at enquiries@naturalgynae.com with questions, we are more than happy to provide any information via email that will assist you in deciding which treatment approach would be best for you

For more information, contact details and appointments click here www.naturalgynae.com