Hyperemesis Gravidarum

What else may help me feel better?

- Get plenty of rest. Try napping during the day. Feeling very tired may increase your nausea and vomiting.
- Take time off work as needed.
- Get help with household chores and childcare.
- Let your friends and family know you need support.
- Try acupressure wrist bands called “seabands”. The bands are worn on the wrist and apply pressure at a specific point. They are commonly used for motion sickness.

Can I take a medication to help the nausea and vomiting?

Yes, there are medications that can help control the nausea and vomiting that are safe to use in pregnancy. Talk with your doctor or midwife about your nausea and vomiting. He or she can prescribe the right medication for you. Do not take any medications or herbal remedies before talking to your doctor or midwife.

If your nausea and vomiting do not go away after taking the medication, speak to your doctor or midwife – you may need to take another medication. You may need to be in the hospital for intravenous fluids or medications.

For more information on hyperemesis gravidarum:

- talk with your nurse, doctor, midwife or dietitian
- call the Nausea and Vomiting of Pregnancy Helpline (1-800-436-8477).
- visit the Motherisk website at www.motherisk.org/sickness/index.php3

Hyperemesis Gravidarum
(severe nausea and vomiting in pregnancy)

What is hyperemesis gravidarum?

Most women have some “morning sickness” during the first 3 months of pregnancy. They feel sick (nausea) and may throw up (vomit). For a few women, the nausea and vomiting become severe. This is called “hyperemesis gravidarum”.

Hyperemesis gravidarum is a serious medical condition, in which you have nausea and vomit more than 5 times a day. It usually starts during the first 3 months of pregnancy. Over time, it can prevent you from taking in enough food and fluids. This can affect your health and your baby’s health.

Seeing a doctor or midwife early can help reduce the effects of hyperemesis gravidarum on you and your baby.

See your doctor or midwife right away if you:

- vomit more than 5 times in a day
- cannot keep fluids and food down, without vomiting
- are losing weight
How can hyperemesis gravidarum affect my baby and me?

Dehydration and weight loss
The nausea and vomiting could cause you to become low in fluids. This could lead to dehydration. Being severely dehydrated can make you feel very unwell.

Being dehydrated increases the chance that your baby may:
• be born premature (before 37 weeks of pregnancy)
• have a low birth weight

If your nausea and vomiting continue for a long time or you lose a lot of weight (more than 5% of usual weight), there is a greater risk of losing your baby. The risk increases if you do not see a doctor or midwife to get help.

Changes in the blood
Continued vomiting can reduce the amount of potassium and sodium in your blood. This is called an electrolyte imbalance. Signs of a severe electrolyte imbalance include confusion and weak muscles. It could also cause seizures.

Hyperemesis gravidarum can also change the acidity of your blood. This is called an acid-base imbalance. Signs of an acid-base imbalance include feeling weak, sleepy, confused and irritable. Your muscles may also twitch and cramp.

Feelings of anxiety and worry
You may feel worried or anxious about how the nausea and vomiting are affecting you and your baby. You may not be able to do your normal activities, including work. If you are having these feelings, please tell your nurse, doctor, midwife or dietitian.

How long does hyperemesis gravidarum last?
It usually ends by 21 weeks of pregnancy. However, some women have it the entire pregnancy.

How common is hyperemesis gravidarum?
You are not alone in having this problem. It occurs in about 1 out of 100 pregnant women. Women who have a pregnancy with more than one baby, called a multiple gestation, have a higher risk of hyperemesis gravidarum.

What causes hyperemesis gravidarum?
The cause of hyperemesis gravidarum is not known. Depression, anxiety, conflict and stress may trigger or worsen the vomiting.

Could changes to my diet help me feel better?
There is no special diet that helps control nausea and vomiting since everyone has different likes and dislikes, and different things may trigger symptoms.

Here are some general tips that may help:
• Eat small amounts of food such as 6 small meals over a day.
• Sip clear fluids, 1 to 2 oz (30 to 60 ml) at a time, throughout the day to prevent dehydration. Clear fluids include:
  • water
  • carbonated drinks
  • clear fruit juice
  • sport drinks such as Gatorade®
  • clear broth
• Avoid an empty stomach or being too hungry or too full. This can increase feelings of nausea.
• Avoid foods with strong flavours and seasonings such as meat cooked with BBQ sauce, bacon, ham, onion, and garlic, as they may trigger symptoms.
• Avoid greasy, fried, or high-fat foods such as pizza or bacon. High fat foods stay in your stomach longer and can trigger vomiting.
• Eat starches such as plain toast and crackers, noodles, pastas, potatoes and rice. They are easily broken down or digested in your stomach.
• Strong food odours may cause nausea. If possible, use a fan or leave your windows and/or doors open to let odours out of the house during cooking and mealtime.
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