

Pregnancy Symptoms: 3rd Trimester

You've reached the final stretch! The third trimester of pregnancy is an exciting time as you get ready to meet your little one. You may feel like there's no way your belly could get any bigger, but it will during your third trimester. Your baby still has a lot of growing to do!

"Most of the growth for the pregnancy is going to be in the third trimester. That is where the mom will gain about a pound a week, and the baby will literally gain about a half a pound a week."

The third trimester of pregnancy lasts from week 28 through week 40 of pregnancy, and sometimes slightly longer. Here's what you can expect. Swelling of the ankles, fingers, and face is very common, but if you experience pain or it is very sudden, call your doctor. And call your doctor if you have uneven swelling, as this could be a sign of Deep Vein Thrombosis.

You may be running to the bathroom more than usual. Your baby is getting bigger and is putting more pressure on your bladder, so you will have to urinate more often. Remember, even though you are urinating more, it's still important to keep drinking plenty of water.

If you experience burning when you go to the bathroom, or try to go and nothing comes out, it could be a urinary tract infection. Let your doctor know so you can treat it. It may be hard to find a comfortable position to sleep in as your stomach grows. Try using a body pillow at night.

You may also have trouble sleeping because of leg cramps. Try stretching it out and standing to relieve the cramp. Lower back pain is also a common symptom during the third trimester. As your uterus grows, it can put pressure on nerves in your back and cause pain.

Stretching, exercise and massage can relieve the pain. A belly band can also help with lower back pain. You will also likely experience Braxton Hicks contractions. This your body's way of preparing for labor. These irregular practice contractions should be relatively weak and not come in regular waves. If you have four or more strong contractions in an hour, you could be going into early labor and should call your doctor right away.

Shortness of breath is another common symptom during the third trimester. The best thing to do is take it easy and try to use good posture so your lungs have room to expand. If you experience chest pain or have a very hard time breathing – especially with no to very little activity - contact your doctor or midwife.

Thanks to the increased blood flow in your pelvis, you may experience hemorrhoids and constipation as well. Constipation can make your hemorrhoids worse. You can treat hemorrhoids with witch hazel wipes or pad. Drinking plenty of water and eating foods high in fiber can help with constipation but mention this to your doctor or midwife if you are still having trouble, as they may recommend a stool softener.

As your belly continues to grow, you may get stretch marks or itchy skin. There's nothing you can really do for stretch marks, but if you are dealing with very itchy skin, you can use moisturizing cream, or an over-the-counter steroid cream approved by your healthcare provider for relief.

You may also experience numbness in your hands and feet due to the increased pressure on your nerves from swelling. Make sure you rest and elevate your feet to help relieve the swelling.

With so many changes going on in your body, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider about how to tell when real labor starts and when to head to the hospital. Signs that you're going into labor include your water breaking or strong and regular contractions. Your water breaking may be a classic "gush" of liquid or it may feel like

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wetness. If you aren't sure if your water has broken, put on a pad and call your doctor or midwife. They may want you to come into the hospital to be examined.

You might also experience a bloody discharge. This is the mucus plug that blocks the cervix. Losing your mucus plug usually means your cervix is dilating or opening and becoming thinner and softer. If you are experiencing labor signs, call your healthcare provider and see if it's time to pack your labor and delivery bag and head to the hospital!