

## Danger Signs in Pregnancy

Many of our patients occasionally experience normal discomforts of pregnancy, including heartburn, needing to urinate frequently, backache, round ligament pain, breast tenderness and swelling, and fatigue. We are happy to discuss suggestions for improving some of these symptoms at your regular prenatal visit, or you may refer to our website for additional information.

The purpose of this handout is to describe the occasions when we want you to call the office and let us know that you are having one or more of these symptoms. If you are experiencing a true emergency outside our normal business hours, you may still call our office number, and the answering service will contact the on-call physician.

**Bleeding:** Although many women with normal pregnancies experience a little bit of spotting, vaginal bleeding that is more than spotting may be a sign of problems with the pregnancy. Heavy bleeding with cramping could be a sign of a miscarriage in the first or early second trimester. In the third trimester, heavy bleeding may indicate placental abruption, which occurs when the placenta separates from the uterine lining. Pregnant women commonly experience spotting after intercourse or after a cervical exam by the physician, but please call our office if you experience vaginal bleeding that is more than spotting.

**Nausea and Vomiting:** Please call our office if you experience vomiting that is preventing fluid intake for more than 24 hours.

**Decreased Movement of the Baby:** Fetal movements may be difficult to perceive while you are active. In addition, the fetus has normal sleep cycles during which you may not perceive fetal movement. If you are concerned about the level of your baby's activity, and you are at least 28 weeks pregnant, try drinking a cold drink with sugar in it (e.g., apple or orange juice). Oftentimes, a quiet baby will become more active with an increase in blood sugar. To observe fetal movements (AKA "kick counts"), lie on your side somewhere quiet, and focus on the baby's movements. If you perceive at least 6 small movements in an hour, that is a normal amount of fetal activity. If the baby's activity is less than this or absent, please contact our office immediately.

**Contractions:** The uterus contains muscle, and when it contracts, the abdomen becomes hard. Contractions in the second or early third trimester may be a sign of preterm labor, but many women experience irregular contractions toward the end of their pregnancies. These Braxton Hicks contractions, or "false labor," usually are less regular than true labor contractions, and oftentimes the contractions will resolve with rest or hydration. If, however, you are concerned that you may be in labor, please notify us. Prior to 37 weeks of pregnancy, please call our office if you experience contractions that occur more than 4 times an hour. If you are 37 weeks or more, you have not had a C-section before, and your doctor is planning a vaginal delivery, call us when your contractions are lasting approximately 60 seconds each, have been 5 or fewer minutes apart for at least an hour, and have not resolved with rest and hydration.

**Fever:** Please contact our office if you experience a fever greater than 101° F.

**Leaking of Amniotic Fluid:** Many pregnant women experience an increase in vaginal discharge or involuntary loss of urine, but the bag of amniotic fluid has not ruptured. In general, if you experience a large gush of fluid and/or experience continued leakage of watery fluid, you may be leaking amniotic fluid. Even if you are not contracting, please notify us immediately if you think your water has broken.

**Preeclampsia Symptoms:** Preeclampsia is a condition in pregnancy involving high blood pressure and other symptoms including headaches, vision problems, and swelling. Although swelling of the extremities is common in pregnancy, please notify us if you experience sudden weight gain with severe swelling of your feet, ankles, hands or face. Please call our office if you have a severe, persistent headache that does not resolve with Tylenol (acetaminophen), if you have severe abdominal pain, or if you experience visual disturbances.

**Problems with Urination:** Please call our office if there is blood in your urine or if you experience burning with urination.

**Flu Symptoms:** Influenza (also known as the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. It is different from a cold. Pregnant women with the flu are at increased risk for serious complications, such as pneumonia, various infections, and dehydration. The flu usually comes on suddenly. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever\* (100.4° F or greater) or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

*\* It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.*

We recommend that all pregnant women receive the flu vaccine as early as possible during the flu season (usually October to May), but it is possible to get sick with the flu even if you have received the flu vaccine. Please contact our office immediately if you think you have the flu.