

*Sickness & Vomiting  
in Pregnancy  
(Hyperemesis Gravidarum)*

*Information for Patients*

Most pregnant women feel sick or vomit (are sick) in early pregnancy. It affects about 3 out of 4 pregnant women and in most cases it is mild and needs no treatment. It is thought to be due to the sudden increase in hormone levels (HCG) that are maintaining the pregnancy. These rise very rapidly over the first 3 months and then stabilise.

The sickness usually improves between 12 and 16 weeks but about 1 in 5 women have some sickness all the way through the pregnancy.

Pregnancy sickness is often called morning sickness but can occur at any time of the day. Feelings of sickness come and go. They usually last between 1 and 4 hours at a time. Some women have more severe symptoms and have more frequent or longer bouts of sickness.

## **What are the risks to the baby?**

The physical effort of retching and being sick does not harm your baby.

If the sickness goes on for a long time, and is severe, the baby may not gain as much weight as normal.

## **What are the risks to you?**

This is a very emotional time and feeling sick can make you feel depressed, but the sickness usually only lasts for a few weeks. Feeling unwell can be disruptive to family life, especially if you need to come into hospital.

If you become dehydrated from the sickness, you will feel tired and have no energy. You will be uncomfortable from having a dry mouth and can get heartburn from being sick.

You will drop your stores of essential vitamins, particularly Vitamin B and this can, very occasionally, cause a problem of the brain called Wernickes Encephalopathy if the vitamins are not replaced.

## **What happens now?**

After an initial assessment in EPAU or on Ward 8, if you are dehydrated you will be admitted and a drip (an intravenous infusion) of salt and water (Normal Saline) will be started.

The nurses will monitor this and they will let you know how much fluid you can drink. This usually starts with sips of water only and then increases, as you are able to drink and not be sick. You can increase the amount of fluids you are taking and start to eat. You should aim to drink about 2 litres a day or 8 cups/glasses of fluid a day. You should avoid fizzy drinks.

The nurses will monitor your intake of fluids and how much urine you pass and how much sickness you have (intake and output). It is important that an accurate record is kept of this as well as the drip.

Your urine will be tested for Ketones every time you pass urine to see how dehydrated you are. Ketones are in your urine because you are not taking in enough calories and you are using your body fat to provide energy. While there are any Ketones present in the urine, and until you are tolerating enough fluid, the drip will stay up.

## **What can I have to help the sickness?**

A medicine that is as safe as possible in pregnancy may be prescribed for the sickness. No medicine can be said to be completely safe in pregnancy, particularly within the first 3 months when the baby is still developing.

This can either be given into the vein through the drip, an injection into the leg, by a suppository into your bottom or taken by mouth.

You will also be prescribed a Vitamin tablet to take 3 times a day if you are able to tolerate things by mouth, or if you are not, a vitamin injection can be given through your drip once a week.

You will also be offered Sea Bands, which are useful in travel sickness and have also been found to help in pregnancy related sickness.

You can also take something for the heartburn if you need it.

## **What tests will be carried out?**

You will have various blood tests carried out from time to time to monitor your condition.

Your weight will also be checked on admission and then weekly.

An Ultrasound scan will be done to check the baby and make sure there is only one. In twin pregnancies the hormone levels go higher and will cause more sickness.

Your urine will be checked to make sure you do not have an infection, as this will also increase the sickness.

## **OUR ADVICE TO HELP RELIEVE YOUR NAUSEA IN HOSPITAL AND AT HOME**

- Drinking is the most important thing. Try to take 8 cups or glasses of fluid a day. Avoid fizzy drinks.
- Plain biscuits may be helpful to nibble on at regular intervals between meals to relieve the nausea.

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## OUR ADVICE TO HELP RELIEVE YOUR NAUSEA IN HOSPITAL AND AT HOME cont/d...

- Eat small, frequent, low fat meals, every two hours in the form of snacks such as toast and jam (no butter), sandwiches, (low fat fillings), soups and crackers, breakfast cereals with low fat milk, - these can be just as nutritious as conventional meals.
- Some people find it better to eat and drink at different times, not together.
- Avoid fatty foods and dairy products.
- Avoid spicy foods.
- Have plenty of rest and keep your room well ventilated.
- Avoid long car journeys
- You may be given anti sickness tablets to take home with you but remember no medicine is completely safe in pregnancy so reduce them as soon as you feel able.
- If you wish to consider any Complimentary Therapies please contact your GP to discuss it. There is very little research or evidence to confirm it, but ginger is thought to reduce the feeling of sickness.

For further information visit the Internet site:

[www.hyperemesis.org.uk](http://www.hyperemesis.org.uk)

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