

SOME FACTS ABOUT CONSTIPATION IN PREGNANCY

Constipation affects up to 25% of women during pregnancy¹

What is constipation?

Constipation is a condition that causes less frequent and more strained bowel movements. Some women will have experienced constipation prior to pregnancy and for others constipation will develop for the first time.

Constipation is most likely to affect women in the first trimester of pregnancy, and symptoms tend to decrease as the pregnancy progresses.

What are the common causes?

Stage of Pregnancy	Common Causes of Constipation
During Early Pregnancy	Most likely an increase in the hormone progesterone which slows gastric motility. As a result, food moves more slowly through the digestive system. The longer food stays in the intestines the more water can be reabsorbed from bowel motions making stools harder to pass.
During Later Pregnancy	The growing baby can put pressure on the large intestine
Other contributing factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● A diet low in fibre● Not drinking enough water or fluids● Lack of exercise● Stress● Some medications● In some cases an underactive thyroid

Simple tips to help relieve constipation in pregnancy:

- Eat foods high in fibre such as whole grain foods (cereals and breads), fresh fruit and vegetables every day. Gradually introduce these into your diet if you are not used to eating foods high in fibre as they may cause you to feel bloated and flatulent. You could also consider taking a fibre supplement.
- Exercise daily, gentle walking at the beginning of the day may be helpful to stimulate bowel movement. Swimming or cycling on a stationary bike may also be helpful and another option is yoga.
- Drink plenty of fluids daily, at least 6-8 glasses of water. Prune juice may also be helpful but take care to minimise sugary drinks.
- Try drinking warm liquids especially in the morning.
- Discuss other options with your pharmacist or doctor if symptoms persist.

1. Department of Health Pregnancy Care Guidelines: Constipation Available at <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/pregnancy-care-guidelines/part-i-common-conditions-during-pregnancy/constipation> (Accessed Sept 2020)