

Pregnancy & Your Body



Pregnancy isn't a sprint, it's a marathon — and your body is gearing up for this feat of endurance from almost the moment of conception.

You've probably already heard about morning sickness, weight gain and breast changes, so here's a look at some of the other incredible changes happening in your body.

1 DENTAL HEALTH

Pregnancy hormones may cause inflammation and bleeding of the gums, also known as gingivitis. Take special care of sensitive teeth during your pregnancy, and keep up with regular dental appointments.

2 BLOOD VOLUME

By weeks 34–36 of pregnancy, your body will have almost 50% more blood than it did before you conceived. You may experience nosebleeds and nasal stuffiness as your mucous membranes swell. You may also feel dizzy, especially if you're hungry. Eat regularly, and try lying on your left side and standing up slowly to avoid becoming lightheaded.

3 HEARTBURN / DIGESTION

Later in pregnancy, you may experience heartburn as the growing uterus pushes up, crowding your stomach. Combat this discomfort by eating small meals throughout the day and avoiding greasy and spicy foods.

Pregnancy hormones will slow the digestive process, causing constipation and hemorrhoids. 50% of pregnant women have hemorrhoids, swollen veins in the rectum that can cause irritation. These will improve after delivery. For now, stay hydrated, eat fiber-rich foods and try not to strain with bowel movements.

4 HIP SPREADING

The hormone relaxin loosens bones throughout the body, including the pubic symphysis. The hips spread in preparation for delivery and the change in size remains permanent.



5 PLACENTA

The placenta is the only "temporary" organ in the human body. It starts to form about a week after conception to deliver nutrients to the developing fetus. It is also an endocrine organ, excreting hormones crucial for pregnancy, labor and nursing.

7 FOOT GROWTH

Up to 70% of women will see their shoe size lengthen and widen during their first pregnancy, sometimes up to a full shoe size. Relaxin and loosening ligaments are to blame.

6 STRETCH MARKS

Your skin will stretch — and sometimes tear — as your baby grows and you gain weight. These stretch marks can itch and leave scars, but they pose no risk to you or your baby. Most women get stretch marks during pregnancy, but you may help prevent them by gaining pregnancy pounds slowly and steadily, using topical creams such as cocoa butter and staying hydrated.