

# CHAPTER 4

## Helping women stay healthy

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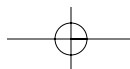
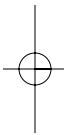
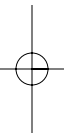
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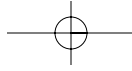
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# Helping women stay healthy



A woman who eats well and takes good care of her body is much more likely to have a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby. In fact, the ways to stay healthy listed in this chapter can be used by women and their families to stay well throughout their whole lives.

staying well

## Eating well

Eating well means eating **enough food** and eating **a variety of healthy foods**.

Eating well:

- helps a woman resist illness and stay healthy.
- keeps a woman's teeth and bones strong.
- gives a woman strength to work.
- helps the baby grow well in the mother's womb.
- helps prevent heavy bleeding after birth.
- helps a mother recover her strength quickly after birth.



Eating well helps a woman and her baby stay healthy and strong.

## Problems from poor nutrition (not eating well)



Poor nutrition can cause tiredness, weakness, difficulty fighting infections, and other serious health problems.

Poor nutrition during pregnancy is especially dangerous. It can cause miscarriage or cause a baby to be born very small or with birth defects. It also increases the chances of a baby or a mother dying during or after birth.

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## Talking to women about food

Talk to women about the food they eat. The earlier women start eating healthier foods, the better chance they have to stay healthy, to have normal births, and to have healthy babies.

To find out whether a woman is eating well, ask her what she usually eats, and how much. For example: "What did you eat yesterday?" Be sure to tell her what is healthy about what she eats. Then make a suggestion for how she could eat better.

*I eat cassava every day, and I usually have some fish — or beans cooked with onions and tomatoes, and I drink soda pop.*

*That sounds good. Cassava gives energy. Beans and fish give strength. If you drink fruit juice instead of soda pop, and you also eat some green vegetables, you will get more vitamins.*



Even if a woman knows the best foods for health, she may not eat them. Many families cannot afford to buy enough food or a wide variety of foods. Other women simply may not like the taste of some foods. To help a woman eat better, suggest healthy foods that she can and will choose to eat.

### Eat more food

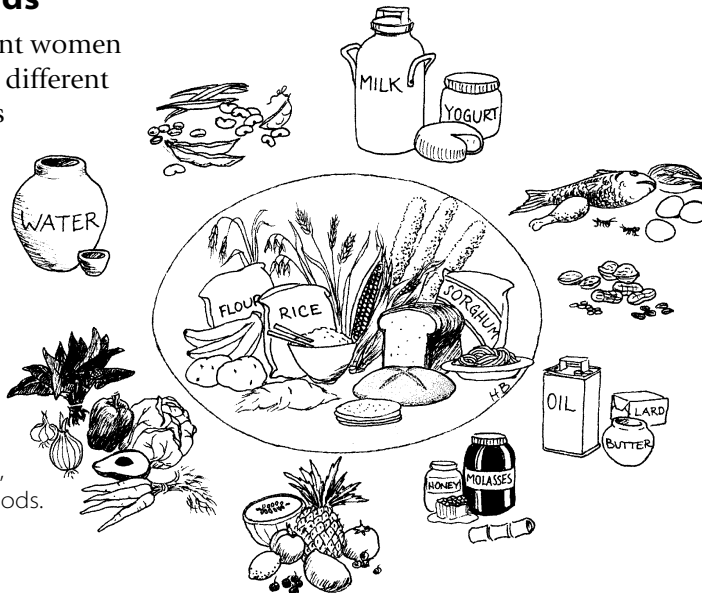
Pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding need to eat more than usual. The extra food gives them enough energy and strength, and helps their babies grow.

Some pregnant women feel nauseated and do not want to eat. But pregnant women need to eat enough — even when they do not feel well. Simple foods like chapatis, tortillas, or rice can be easier for these women to eat.

### Eat a variety of foods

It is important for pregnant women (like everyone else) to eat different kinds of food: main foods (carbohydrates), grow foods (proteins), glow foods (vitamins and minerals), and go foods (fats, oils, and sugar), along with plenty of fluids.

For a healthier body, eat many kinds of foods.



**Main foods (carbohydrates)**

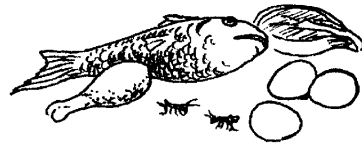
In most parts of the world, people eat one main food at each meal. This main food may be rice, maize, wheat, millet, cassava, taro, plantain, breadfruit, or another low-cost starchy food. These foods give the body energy. But to grow and stay healthy, the body needs other types of food too.

**Grow foods (proteins)**

Grow foods contain protein, which is needed for the growth of muscles, bones, and strong blood. Everyone needs protein to be healthy and to grow.

**Some grow foods high in proteins:**

- legumes (beans, peas, and lentils)
- nuts and seeds
- meat, fish, and insects
- eggs
- cheese, milk, and yogurt

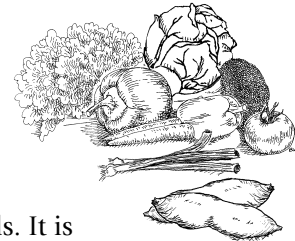


**Note:** Meat, fish, and cheese are nutritious foods but they can carry parasites or disease when they are eaten raw. Pregnant women should only eat fish, meat, or cheese that is well cooked or pasteurized. Fish, especially fatty fish, can also contain mercury and other poisons because water is often contaminated. Pregnant women should avoid fatty fish, to be safe.

**Glow foods (vitamins and minerals)**

Glow foods contain vitamins and minerals, which help the body fight infection and keep the eyes, skin, and bones healthy and strong.

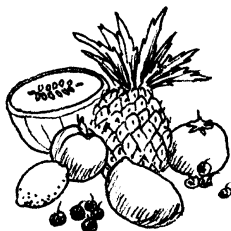
Fruits and vegetables are high in vitamins and minerals. It is important for women to eat as many different fruits and vegetables as they can.



**Go foods (sugars and fats)**

Go foods contain sugars and fats, which give the body energy. Everyone needs these foods to be healthy.

These days, many people eat more sugars and fats than they need. That is because more people drink sugary soda pop, or eat foods that come from packages instead of foods made at home. These packaged, sugary foods are expensive and not as healthy. They also damage the teeth. It is better to eat go foods that are natural, not packaged.

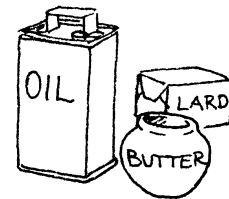


**Some healthy go foods high in sugars:**

- fruit
- honey
- molasses

**Some go foods high in fats:**

- nuts and seeds
- avocados
- vegetable oil, butter, ghee, and lard
- fatty meat



## Chapter 4: Helping women stay healthy

**Eat these 5 important vitamins and minerals every day**

Pregnant and breastfeeding women need more of five vitamins and minerals — iron, folic acid, calcium, iodine, and vitamin A — than other people do. Pregnant women should try to get these vitamins and minerals every day because the baby needs them to grow and be healthy. Every pregnant woman needs enough for the baby and for herself.

**Iron**

Iron helps make blood healthy and prevents anemia (weak blood, see page 116). A pregnant woman needs a lot of iron to have enough energy, to prevent too much bleeding at the birth, and to make sure that the growing baby can form healthy blood and store iron for the first few months after birth.

**These foods contain a lot of iron:**

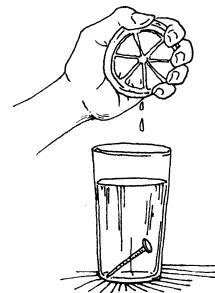
- meat (especially liver, kidney, and other organ meats)
- poultry (birds)
- grasshoppers, crickets, and termites
- fish, clams, and oysters
- eggs
- beans, peas, and lentils
- sunflower, pumpkin, and squash seeds
- dark green leafy vegetables
- breadfruit
- yams
- hard squash
- blackstrap molasses

**Other ways to get more iron:**

- Eat iron foods with citrus fruits or tomatoes. The vitamin C in these foods helps a woman absorb iron into her system.
- Cook food in iron pots or add a clean piece of iron — like an iron nail — to the cooking pot. Only use a nail that you know is made of pure iron, not a mix of metals.
- Put a clean piece of pure iron, like an iron nail, in a little lemon juice for a few hours. Drink the juice mixed with clean water.

It can be difficult for a pregnant woman to get enough iron, even if she eats iron-rich foods every day. If possible, she should also take iron pills or iron syrup. These medicines may be called ferrous sulfate, ferrous gluconate, ferrous fumarate, or other names.

In many places health centers will give iron pills to pregnant women. Sometimes iron pills are combined with folic acid. The iron pills may make it hard for the woman to pass stool (constipation), and her stool may turn black. These problems should get better in a few days. (See page 76.)



**Hookworm and malaria can cause anemia**

Women with **hookworm** are likely to have anemia. Hookworm can easily be treated with mebendazole or albendazole, though these drugs should not be taken in the first 3 months of pregnancy. These drugs have not been tested enough to be sure that they are safe for women who are in the later months of pregnancy or who are breastfeeding. However, most doctors believe that the benefit of treating hookworm is greater than the possible harm of these medicines.

If hookworm is common in your community, ask your local health authority what treatment is recommended for pregnant women.

**Malaria** can also cause anemia and other serious problems in pregnancy. See page 98 for how to prevent or treat malaria.

**Folic acid (folate)**

Lack of folic acid can cause anemia in the mother and severe birth defects in the baby. To prevent these problems, it is most important for a woman to get enough folic acid before she gets pregnant and in the first few months of pregnancy.

**These foods contain a lot of folic acid:**

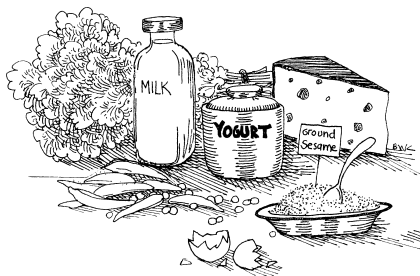
- dark green leafy vegetables
- meat (especially liver, kidney, and other organ meats)
- peas and beans
- sunflower, pumpkin, and squash seeds
- whole grains (brown rice, whole wheat)
- fish
- eggs
- mushrooms



Some women also take folic acid pills.

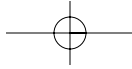
**Folic acid pills**

- take 0.5 to 0.8 mg (500 to 800 mcg) folic acid.....by mouth, 1 time each day



**Calcium**

A growing baby needs a lot of calcium to make new bones, especially in the last few months of pregnancy. Women need calcium for strong bones and teeth.



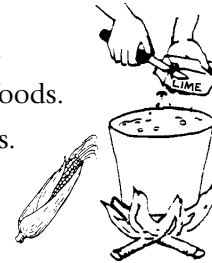
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**These foods contain a lot of calcium:**

- milk, curd, yogurt, and cheese
- ground sesame (tahini)
- almonds
- green leafy vegetables
- yellow vegetables (hard squash, yams)
- shellfish
- lime (carbon ash)
- bone meal and eggshells

Women can also get more calcium in these ways:

- Soak bones or eggshells in vinegar or lemon juice for a few hours. Then use the liquid to make soup or eat with other foods.
- Add lemon juice, vinegar, or tomatoes when cooking bones.
- Grind eggshells into a fine powder and mix into food.
- Soak maize in lime (carbon ash) before cooking it.



**Iodine**

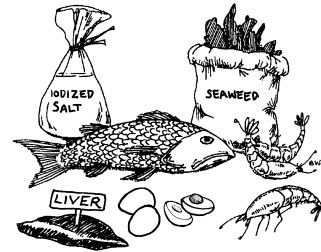
Iodine prevents goiter (swelling of the throat) and other problems in adults. Lack of iodine in a pregnant woman can cause her child to have cretinism, a disability that affects thinking.



The easiest way to get enough iodine is to use iodized salt instead of regular salt.

**These foods contain a lot of iodine:**

- shellfish (like shrimp)
- fish
- seaweed
- egg yolks
- liver



If cretinism or goiter are common in your area, find out if the local health ministry will give iodized oil by mouth or iodine by injection. If not, women can make iodine solution at home with polyvidone iodine.

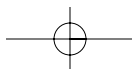
**To make an iodine solution to drink**

Add 1 drop of Lugol's iodine to 1 glass of clean drinking water or milk.



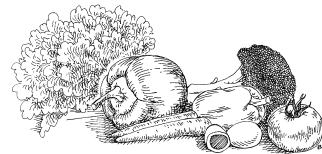
In places where goiter or cretinism are common, everyone except breastfeeding babies should drink 1 glass of this iodine solution every month of his or her life. This is especially important for children and pregnant women. Do not take more iodine than this. Too much is dangerous.

Store iodine at room temperature, and in dark containers to protect it from light.



### **Vitamin A**

Vitamin A prevents night blindness and helps fight infections. Lack of vitamin A also causes blindness in children. A woman needs to eat plenty of vitamin A during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.



Dark yellow and green leafy vegetables and yellow fruits have vitamin A.



Along with eating healthy foods, women should drink plenty of clean water and other fluids every day. Fruit juices, coconut water, animal milks, and many herbal teas are all healthy fluids to drink.

### **Ideas about food affect women's health**

Some beliefs about foods are harmful — especially when people believe that women should not eat as much as men do, or should not eat a variety of foods.

#### ***It is not safe for girls to be fed less than boys***

Girls need as much food as boys — to grow and learn and work. If a girl does not get enough food, her bones may not grow well. This can cause serious problems during labor when the girl becomes a woman and has babies of her own.

#### ***When a woman must feed her family first, she may not get enough to eat***

A woman may be taught to feed her family before herself. She eats only what is left and often does not get as much as others in the family. This is never healthy. And when a woman is pregnant, or has just had a baby, it can be very dangerous.

If the family will not help the woman eat enough, she may need to hide food, eat while she is cooking, or eat while her husband is out of the house.



#### ***Packaged and processed foods are rarely as good as homemade***

People are eating more and more packaged and processed foods. Some people like the taste, and some people think that packaged foods are healthier.

Packaged foods may be advertised as the healthiest choice, but this is rarely the truth! Advertisers will say anything just to sell products. Some packaged foods are fortified with vitamins and minerals, but our bodies cannot use these added-on vitamins as well as our bodies use the vitamins that we get from eating whole, fresh foods. Most packaged foods contain more sugar, salt, and fat than we need. Many are full of chemicals to keep the food looking and tasting fresh, and some of these chemicals have not been carefully tested to be sure of their safety.



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**Avoiding foods can be dangerous**

In many places, pregnant women are told not to eat certain foods. In these communities, people believe that these foods will harm the baby. At the same time, a doctor or a midwife may tell a woman it is important to eat those same foods. This can be confusing for the woman.

Avoiding foods can be dangerous. For a woman to be healthy during and after pregnancy, she must eat a wide variety of foods — main foods, grow foods, glow foods, and go foods. Eating only one kind of food is not enough.

If a woman does choose to avoid certain foods, make sure she is getting enough of each kind of food, and enough vitamins and minerals from her food.

Everyone needs to eat a wide variety of foods.

**Finding creative answers**

Beliefs about food can be hard to change. But you may find ways to help women eat better without working against their beliefs. This example is based on a true story:



Maria is a midwife in Guatemala. She and her people believe that some foods are “hot” foods, and some foods are “cold” foods. They believe that pregnant women should not eat cold foods.

To Maria and her people, beans and eggs are cold foods (even when they are cooked). But Maria knows that beans and eggs are good, low-cost ways for pregnant women to get the protein and iron they need.

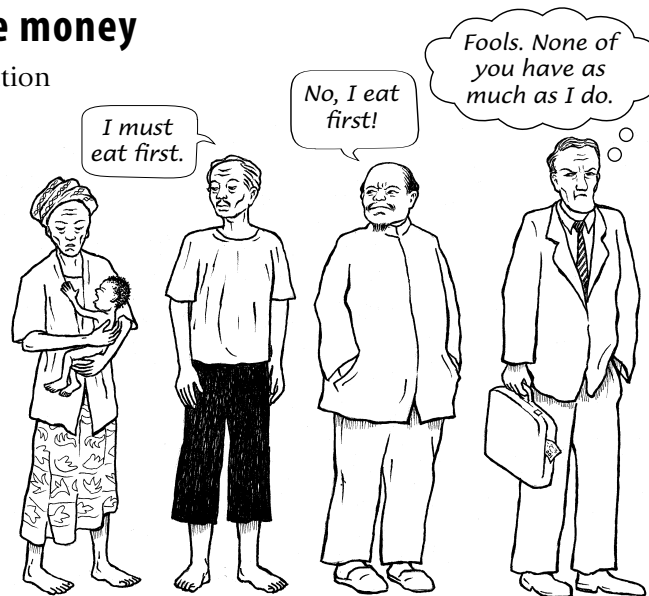
Maria wants pregnant women to eat well, but they will not eat cold foods. And Maria too thinks that cold foods may not be good for pregnant women to eat. Her solution is simple and smart. She tells pregnant women to eat beans and eggs with a little hot pepper or another hot food. This way, the foods will not be cold anymore.

Maria has found a creative answer to a problem. She has found a way for pregnant women to eat better and has shown respect for the beliefs of her community.

## Eating well with little money

The biggest cause of poor nutrition is poverty. Rich people in wealthy countries can buy any foods they want, while those in poor communities cannot. And within each community, some can afford to eat better than others. A few people own most of the land or businesses, and make money off of the work of others. Even within each family, a father may eat better than his wife or children.

To learn more about the root causes of poverty and ways to work for change, see the books *Where There Is No Doctor* and *Helping Health Workers Learn*.



The problems of hunger and poor nutrition will not be solved until we all share with each other fairly.

staying well



Even a very poor family can eat better by spending money wisely. A father who buys alcohol and tobacco could instead buy nutritious food or he could buy a hen to lay eggs. A mother who buys her children sweets or soda pop could instead buy eggs, beans, or other low-cost healthful foods.

Here are some ideas that families can use to eat better with little money:

### Breast milk

Breast milk costs nothing, and has all the nutrition a baby needs. Young children do not need fortified milks — especially if they are still breastfeeding and eating other foods.

### Beans, peas, and lentils

Beans and other legumes have a lot of protein and vitamins, and they usually do not cost much. They have even more vitamins if they are sprouted before being eaten.

Planting legumes makes soil richer. Other crops will grow better in a field where legumes once grew.



Grow beans this year.

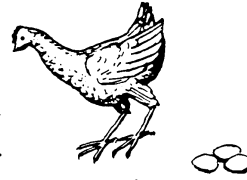


Next year, maize.

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### **Less expensive meats and animal products**

Blood and organ meats like liver, heart, and kidney have a lot of iron and may cost less than other meats. Fish and chicken are as healthy as other meats, and usually cost less — especially for a family that fishes or raises their own chickens.



Eggs have a lot of protein, iron, and vitamin A. Eggs give more protein for less money than almost any other food.

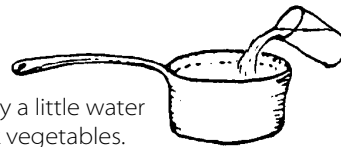
### **Whole grains**

Grains, like wheat, rice, and corn, are more nutritious when they have not been refined (processed to take out the color). Taking out the color takes out healthy things too. White bread and white rice have less vitamins, minerals, and proteins than brown bread or brown rice.

### **Vegetables and fruits**

When vegetables are boiled or steamed, some of the vitamins from the foods go into the cooking water. Use this water to make soups.

Use only a little water to cook vegetables.



The outside leaves of plants are usually thrown away, but sometimes they can be eaten. The leaves of the cassava plant have more vitamins and protein than the root.

Many wild fruits and berries are rich in vitamins and natural sugars that give energy.

### **Avoid buying vitamins**

Most of the time people can get enough vitamins and minerals by eating a variety of foods. Buying vitamins is usually a waste of money.

But pregnancy and breastfeeding are times that women may need to take extra vitamins — more than what they can get from food. Vitamin pills work as well as vitamin injections, and cost less.

## **Caring for the body for good health**

For a woman to stay healthy in pregnancy — or anytime — it is wise for her to keep clean, exercise, and get plenty of rest.

### **Keep clean**

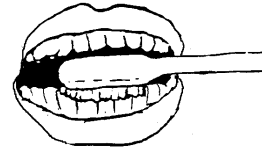
Keeping the body clean helps prevent infections. If possible, the mother should regularly wash her body, including her genitals, with clean water.

## Care for the teeth and mouth

Healthy teeth help a person's whole body be healthy, and care for the teeth is especially important in pregnancy because unhealthy teeth can lead to gum infections. This can cause a baby to be born too early.

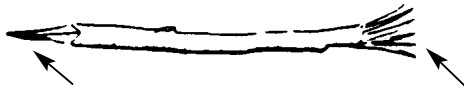
In some places there is a saying, "Have a baby, lose a tooth." But this does not have to be true! A woman can protect her teeth in these ways:

- Eat calcium-rich foods.
- Avoid sweets, candy, and soda pop.
- Clean the teeth after every meal with a soft brush, tooth stick, or rough cloth. Toothpaste, salt, or plain water on the brush are helpful but not necessary.



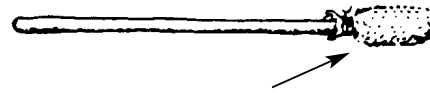
Clean the surfaces of all the teeth, between the teeth, and the gums every day.

To make a tooth-cleaning stick:



Sharpen this end to clean between the teeth.

Chew on this end and use the fibers as a brush.



Or tie a piece of rough cloth on the end of a stick.

If possible, everyone should see a dentist or dental worker regularly.

staying well

## Exercise

Exercise makes a woman's body stronger. During pregnancy, exercise helps her body get ready for labor and birth. Exercise can also help a woman have energy and feel happy.

Many women get all the exercise they need by hauling water, working in the fields, milling grain, chasing after children, and walking up and down hills.

Women who work sitting or standing (in offices, stores, or factories, for example) or who do not move around much during the day usually need more exercise. They can take long walks, dance, do physical work, or find another way to move.



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### Squeezing exercise (Kegels)

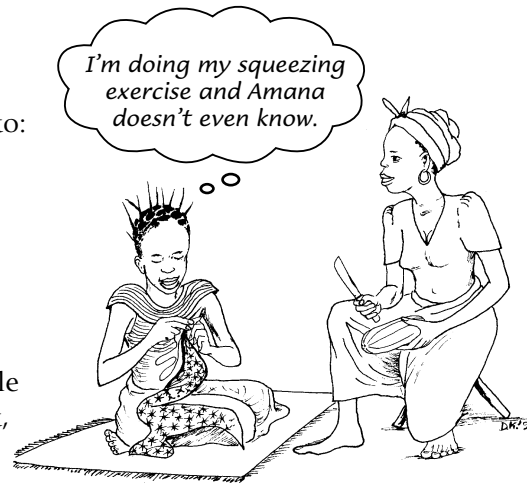
The squeezing exercise strengthens muscles in the pelvis and vagina.

Doing the squeezing exercise can help to:

- prevent leaking urine.
- prevent the vagina from tearing during birth.
- speed healing after birth.
- increase sexual pleasure.

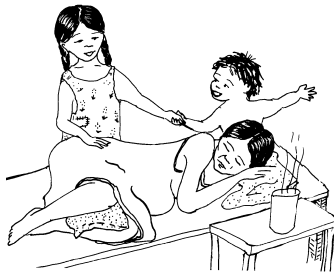
A woman can learn this exercise while she is urinating. As the urine comes out, she should squeeze the muscles in her vagina until the urine stops. Once she learns how to squeeze these muscles, she should only do it when she is not urinating.

The squeezing exercise is helpful at all times, not just during pregnancy. If possible, women should practice at least 4 times a day, doing at least 10 squeezes each time.



### Sleep, rest, and relax

Sleep and rest help women stay strong and resist sickness. Getting enough rest also helps prevent high blood pressure, sick babies, and other problems.



Many women must work all day in fields, factories, or stores. Then they must also haul water, find fuel, mill grain, cook, clean, and care for their families. This can be very hard at any time. It can be especially hard for pregnant women who need more rest than usual.

Explain to pregnant women that it is important for them to rest for a few minutes every 1 or 2 hours. Help the woman's family understand why it is important for her to rest and sleep.

### Enjoy the pregnancy

If women have enough food, rest, and care, pregnancy can be a wonderful time.

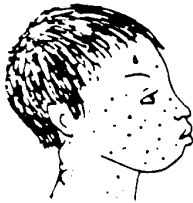
Many communities have rituals and practices that honor a pregnant woman. People help her with her work, bring her special foods, or give her massages or gifts. Customs like these help a woman get the food and rest she needs, and help her feel good about herself and her pregnancy.



## Things to avoid during pregnancy and breastfeeding

Sicknesses, drugs, and poisonous chemicals are not healthy for anyone. They are particularly dangerous in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. The following things are the most dangerous in the first 3 months of pregnancy, but they can be dangerous at all times.

### Stay away from people with rubella and other sicknesses



Pregnant women should stay away from people with sicknesses or rashes.

It is best for pregnant women to stay away from people who are sick. This will help protect them from becoming sick themselves.

Some sicknesses are particularly dangerous to pregnant women or their babies. Rubella (German measles) is one sickness that can cause serious birth defects or disabilities in the baby, including deafness and heart problems, and can even cause death.

### Avoid taking medicines

When a woman takes medicines, they pass through her blood to her baby. Medicines that are safe for a grown woman or even a child can be dangerous to the tiny baby inside the womb.

Cough syrups, pain relievers, some modern medicines, and some plant medicines can all be dangerous. Some of them can cause birth defects or disabilities in the baby, including disabilities that affect thinking or the brain.

If possible, pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding should not take medicines. If a woman is sick and needs medicine, find out if this medicine is safe in pregnancy or while breastfeeding. Look in the green medicine pages at the end of this book (see page 463) or ask a doctor if the medicine is safe. If plant medicines are used in your community, try to learn which ones are safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Most of the medicines we recommend in this book are safe to take during pregnancy or breastfeeding. (If they are not safe, we will include a warning about when they can be dangerous.) But even drugs that are safe should only be taken when they are truly needed. Rest, water, and healthful foods are often enough to cure sicknesses and other problems.



Pregnant women should only take medicines that are safe in pregnancy and that are truly needed.

## Avoid smoking, alcohol, and other drugs

Cigarette smoke, alcohol, and other drugs are all harmful to the mother. When a woman smokes, drinks, or takes drugs, they also pass through her blood to her baby.

Smoking is dangerous for anyone. It can lead to serious problems including cancer. When a pregnant woman smokes, or even when she breathes the smoke from someone near her, her blood vessels get smaller and do not carry as much air or food to her baby. Because of this, babies of women who smoke are more likely to be small or sick.

Drinking a lot of alcohol can be dangerous for anyone. Heavy drinking can lead to many illnesses including serious problems of the liver. When a pregnant woman drinks, even just 1 or 2 drinks a day, her baby can have birth defects or disabilities that affect the brain.

Some drugs, particularly opium, heroin, cocaine, and barbiturates, are very addictive and dangerous. When a pregnant woman takes these drugs, her baby can be born with a drug addiction or with other serious health problems.

If you work with a woman who may be addicted to alcohol or other drugs, try to find help for her. She may be able to stop if she understands the risks to her and her baby.

Advise her to stay away from people who are smoking, drinking, or taking drugs.

You may be able to help her find others in your community who have stopped using alcohol or drugs and who meet to support each other. The book *Where Women Have No Doctor* has more ideas about how to help someone stop abusing alcohol and drugs.



Whatever a mother puts into her body passes to her baby.

*I'm so glad I can talk to you all instead of having another drink.*



## Stay away from chemicals and fumes

Strong chemicals used for cleaning, and poisons used to kill pests in the fields or at home, are dangerous for everyone. They are especially dangerous to women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. These chemicals can cause miscarriage, infertility, birth defects, cancer, and other illnesses.

Any chemical with a strong smell is probably not safe. Many dangerous chemicals have no smell at all.

If possible, everyone should avoid these dangerous chemicals. But a pregnant woman should have no contact with them. She should not use them herself or breathe chemical fumes or dust. Her family should not store food in containers that once had chemicals inside. Tiny amounts of the chemicals — enough to cause harm — can stay in the container even after it is washed.

Families should try not to use chemicals at all. But many people who work with chemicals have no choice. It is part of their job at a factory, on a farm, cleaning, or somewhere else. People who use chemicals at work may be able to talk to the other workers about the problem. Maybe all the workers together can talk to the owner about using fewer chemicals or using safer ones.

### Poisonous chemicals include:

- pesticides (chemicals that kill bugs or weeds) used in farming.
- pesticides used at home to kill bugs or rodents.
- strong cleaners and solvents.
- some kinds of glue and paint.
- gasoline, oil, and other fuels.



### If someone in the family must work with chemicals, he or she should:

- use as few chemicals, and as little of each one, as possible.
- keep chemicals away from places where food is stored.
- keep chemicals away from children.
- avoid breathing chemicals. Wear a mask or at least cover the mouth and nose, and try to work where there is a good air flow.
- avoid getting chemicals on the skin. Wear gloves, long sleeves, and closed shoes.
- after working with chemicals, change clothes before coming in the house. Pregnant women should not wash these clothes.



## Clean and sterilize tools

All the tools used at a birth, exam, or procedure must be cleaned and sterilized. Cleaning and sterilizing the tools gets rid of germs. This protects women from getting sick.

### 1. Soak your tools

Tools that have been used must be soaked for at least 20 minutes in bleach solution (see page 57).

### 2. Clean your tools

All tools and equipment you use at a birth or a procedure must be clean. Wash them well after each birth, using a brush to remove any blood or dirt in the hinges or rough edges of your tools. Clean off any rust, and get rid of tools that are dull or damaged. To protect yourself, wear heavy gloves when you clean your tools.

After everything is washed, any tools that you use inside a woman's body must also be sterilized to kill germs.



Carefully wash all the dirt off your tools.

### 3. Sterilize your tools

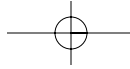
To sterilize means to kill all the germs on something. If your tools are sterilized, they will not spread germs to women when you use them. This will protect women from getting infections.

#### What do we mean when we say "sterile"?

**Sterilize** means kill **all** the germs that cause infections. To sterilize a tool you must use baking or pressure steaming.

**Disinfect** means to kill **most** of the germs that cause infections. Some soaps and cleaning products are called "disinfectant." But to disinfect medical tools or instruments you cannot simply clean something with a disinfectant soap — you must boil, steam, or soak the tool in disinfectant chemicals. This kind of disinfection is called High Level Disinfection (HLD).

All the procedures in this book can be done safely with tools that are either sterile or HLD. To be simple, we only use the word "sterilize" or "sterile" throughout the book. But any time we say that a tool should be sterile, we really mean it can be sterile **or** HLD.

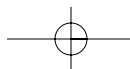


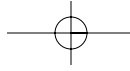
## CHAPTER 6

# Common changes in pregnancy

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# Common changes in pregnancy



During pregnancy a woman's body changes. These changes can sometimes be uncomfortable, but most of the time they are normal. In this chapter, we describe some of these changes, and discuss ways to help women feel better. We also explain how to tell when a woman's discomfort may be a sign that something dangerous is happening with her pregnancy.

There are many ideas about how to treat the discomforts of pregnancy. We cannot explain all of these ideas here. If you know remedies or treatments for these problems which we do not explain, use the remedies that work for you. We do not have all the answers. But use the ideas on page 19 to help you decide if remedies are helpful or if they may be harmful. Not all remedies work.

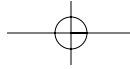
## Changes in eating and sleeping

### Upset stomach (nausea) and dislike of some foods

Many women have nausea in the first months of pregnancy. Sometimes it is called morning sickness. No one knows for sure what causes morning sickness, but for many women, the way they eat affects it. If the nausea is mild, encourage the woman to try any of these remedies:

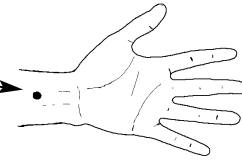
- Eat a food that has protein before bed or in the night. Some good foods with protein are beans, nuts, and cheese.
- Eat a few crackers, dry bread, dry tortillas, dry chapatis, or other grain food when she first wakes up in the morning.
- Eat many small meals instead of 2 or 3 larger ones, and take small sips of liquid often.
- Take 50 milligrams vitamin B-6, 2 times each day. (Do not take more.)





## Chapter 6: Common changes in pregnancy

- Use acupressure to relieve nausea. Find the spot 3 fingers above the wrist between the 2 tendons on the inside of the woman's arm. Press on this spot, moving your finger in small circles. Press firmly but not hard enough to hurt. If acupressure is going to help, the woman should start to feel better within 5 minutes.



- Drink a cup of ginger, mint, or cinnamon tea 2 or 3 times a day, before meals. To make mint or cinnamon tea, put a teaspoon of mint leaves or a stick of cinnamon in a cup of boiled water. Let the tea sit for a few minutes before drinking it. To make ginger tea, boil crushed or sliced ginger root in water for at least 15 minutes.

A pregnant woman may suddenly dislike a food that she usually likes. It is OK not to eat that food, and she will probably begin to like it again after the birth. She should be careful that the rest of her diet contains a lot of nutritious food.

### Food cravings

A food craving is a strong desire to eat a certain food, or even something that is not food at all, like dirt, chalk, or clay.

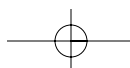
If a woman gets a craving for nutritious foods (like beans, eggs, fruits, and vegetables), it is OK for her to eat as much as she wants. But if she wants a lot of "junk food" (like candy, soda, or packaged snacks) she should eat nutritious food first.

A woman who craves things that are not food, like dirt or clay, should **not** eat them. They may poison her and her baby. They may also give her parasites, like worms, that can make her sick. Encourage her to eat iron-rich foods (see page 36) and calcium-rich foods (see page 38) instead.



### Burning or pain in the stomach or between the breasts (heartburn)

A burning feeling or pain in the stomach or between the breasts is called indigestion or heartburn. Heartburn happens because the growing baby crowds the mother's stomach and pushes it higher than usual. The acids in the mother's stomach that help digest food are pushed up into her chest, where they cause a burning feeling. This is not dangerous and usually goes away after the birth.



Here are some things a woman can try to make herself more comfortable:

- Keep her stomach less full by eating smaller meals more often and by eating foods and drinking liquids separately.
- Avoid eating spicy or greasy foods, drinking coffee, or smoking cigarettes — all of which can irritate the stomach.
- Regularly eat papaya or pineapple, which have enzymes that help the stomach digest food.
- Keep her head higher than her stomach when lying down or sleeping. This will keep her stomach acids in her belly and out of her chest.
- Calm the acids in the stomach by drinking milk or taking a low-salt antacid that contains no aspirin. (Antacids are not dangerous but they cost money and they make it harder for the body to use nutrients from food. Try other methods before using antacids.)



## Sleepiness

Some pregnant women feel sleepy much of the day. This is most common during the first 3 months.

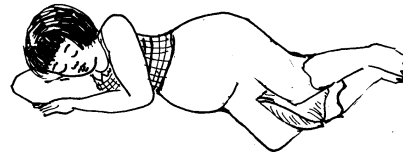
It is normal for pregnant women to feel sleepy. Their bodies are telling them to slow down and rest. But if a woman also feels weak, she may have other problems, like a sickness, depression (see page 274), or anemia (see page 116).



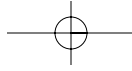
## Difficulty sleeping

If a woman cannot sleep because she is uncomfortable or restless, it may help if:

- she lies on her side with something comfortable between her knees and at her lower back. She can use a pillow, a rolled-up blanket, banana leaves, or some other padding.
- someone gives her a massage.
- she drinks herbal teas that help her sleep.



Fighting, worry, and unhappiness in a woman's house or family can make it difficult for her to sleep. If possible, a family should avoid arguing before going to sleep.

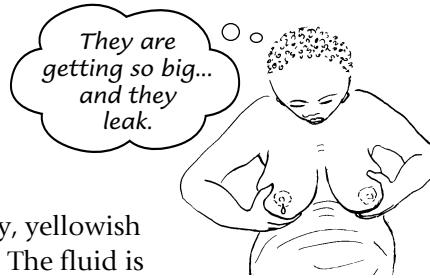


## Body changes and discomforts

### Swollen breasts

A woman's breasts get bigger during pregnancy because they are getting ready to make milk for the baby. Sometimes the breasts are also itchy or sore.

During the last months of pregnancy, a watery, yellowish fluid may leak out of the nipples. This is normal. The fluid is colostrum — the first milk for the baby.



### Swollen feet

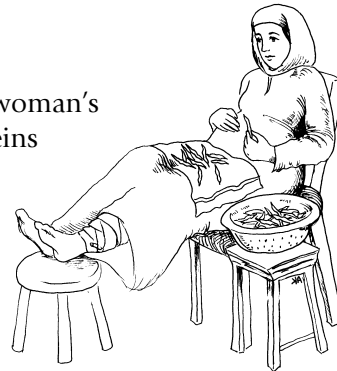
Swelling of the feet is very common, especially in the afternoon or in hot weather. Swelling of the feet is usually not dangerous, but severe swelling when the mother wakes up in the morning, or swelling of the hands and face anytime, can be signs of pre-eclampsia (see page 125).

Swelling in the feet may improve if the woman puts her feet up for a few minutes at least 2 or 3 times a day, eats fewer packaged foods that are very salty, and drinks more water or fruit juices.

### Swollen veins (varicose veins)

Swollen blue veins that appear in the legs or on the woman's genitals are called varicose veins. Sometimes these veins hurt. If the swollen veins are in the legs, they may feel better if the mother puts her feet up often. Strong stockings or elastic bandages may also help.

If the swollen veins are around the genitals, they can cause bleeding problems if they tear during birth. Putting a cool cabbage leaf on the genitals may help.



### Constipation (difficulty passing stool)

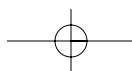
Some pregnant women have difficulty passing stool. This is called constipation.

To prevent or treat constipation, a woman should:

- eat more vegetables and fruits.
- eat whole grains (brown rice and whole wheat instead of white rice or white flour).
- drink at least 8 cups of clean water a day.
- walk, move, and exercise every day.



Home or plant remedies that soften the stool or make it slippery (like remedies made from psyllium seed or certain fruits or fiber plants) may also help.





**WARNING! Pregnant women should not take medicines called laxatives or purgatives for constipation.** These work by making the bowels tighten or contract — and they may cause labor to start too soon. Some can harm the baby.

Also, pregnant women should not wash out the bowels with water (enema). This could also start labor too soon.

## Hemorrhoids (piles)

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins around the anus. They may burn, hurt, or itch. Sometimes they bleed when the woman passes stool, especially if she is constipated. The woman should try to avoid getting constipated by eating a lot of fruit and vegetables and drinking plenty of fluids.

Sitting or standing a lot can make hemorrhoids worse. But sitting in a cool bath or lying down can help. Some women say it helps to soak a clove of garlic in vegetable oil and then insert it into the anus.

If you have heard of other remedies, ask an experienced health worker whether they are safe. Some remedies are dangerous for pregnant women and may hurt the baby.



Pregnant women need to urinate much more often.

## Needing to urinate often

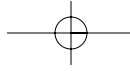
Needing to urinate (pee) often is normal, especially in the first and last months of pregnancy. This happens because the growing womb presses against the bladder (the place where the body stores urine). It is so common that some midwives joke: "A man who cannot find his pregnant wife should wait near the place where she urinates. If she is not there, she will be soon!"

If urinating hurts, itches, or burns, the woman may have a bladder infection (see page 128) or a vaginal infection (see Chapter 18, page 320). Be sure to treat these infections right away — they can cause early labor and other problems.

## Discharge (wetness from the vagina)

Discharge is the wetness all women have from the vagina. A woman's body uses this discharge to clean itself from the inside. For most women the discharge changes during their monthly cycle. Pregnant women often have a lot of discharge, especially near the end of pregnancy. It may be clear or yellowish. This is normal.

Changes in the discharge can be a sign of an infection if the discharge is gray, green, lumpy, or has a bad smell, or if the vagina itches or burns (see Chapter 18, page 320).



## Chapter 6: Common changes in pregnancy

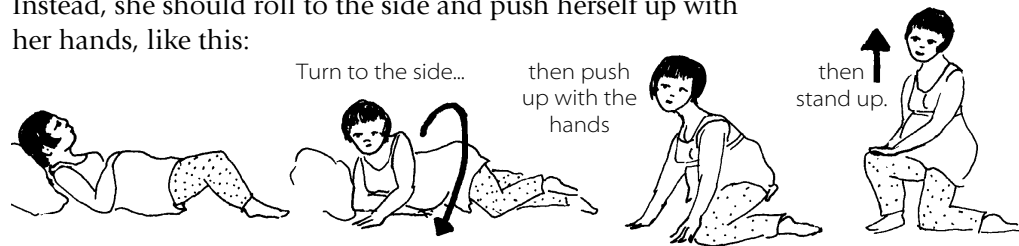
### Difficulty getting up and down

It is better if a pregnant woman does not lie flat on her back. When a woman is on her back, the weight of the womb presses on the big blood vessels that bring food and oxygen to the baby. If the mother wants to be on her back, she should put something behind her so she is not lying completely flat.

A pregnant woman should also be careful how she gets up. She should not sit up like this:



Instead, she should roll to the side and push herself up with her hands, like this:



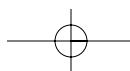
### Shortness of breath

Many women get short of breath (cannot breathe as deeply as usual) when they are pregnant. This is because the growing baby crowds the mother's lungs and she has less room to breathe. Reassure her that this is normal.

But if a woman is also weak and tired, or if she is short of breath **all of the time**, she should be checked for signs of sickness, heart problems, anemia (see page 116), or poor diet (see page 117). Get medical advice if you think she may have any of these problems.

### Feeling hot or sweating a lot

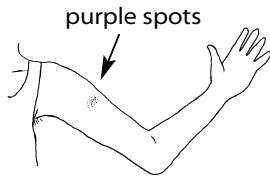
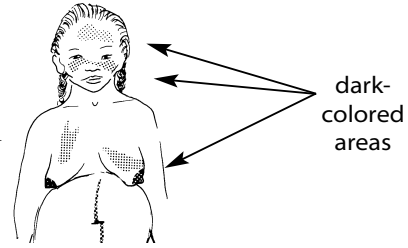
Feeling hot is very common, and as long as there are no other warning signs (such as signs of bladder infection, see page 128), the woman should not worry. She can dress in cool clothes, bathe frequently, and drink plenty of water and other fluids.





### The mask of pregnancy

The mask of pregnancy is a name for dark-colored areas that may appear on the face, breasts, and belly of some pregnant women. This mask is not harmful. Usually most of the color goes away after the birth. A woman may be able to avoid dark areas on her face by wearing a hat when she goes out in the sun.



### Purple spots on the skin

Purple spots come from small groups of veins under the skin. They sometimes happen when blood vessels swell. They are not harmful and usually go away after the birth.

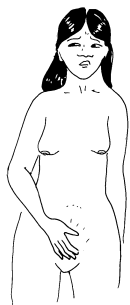
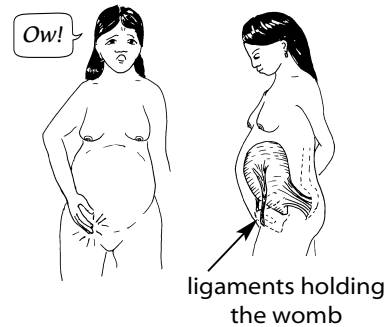
### Aches and pains in the joints

A pregnant woman's body gets soft and loose so the baby can get bigger, and so she can give birth. Sometimes her joints also get loose and uncomfortable, especially the hips. This is not dangerous, but she can more easily sprain her ankles or other joints. So she should move more carefully. Her joints will feel better after the birth.

### Sudden pain in the side of the lower belly

The womb is held in place by ligaments on each side. Ligaments are like ropes that attach the womb to the mother's bones.

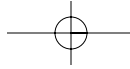
A sudden movement will sometimes cause a sharp pain in these ligaments. This is not dangerous. The pain will stop in a few minutes. It may help to stroke the belly gently, or to put a warm cloth on it.



### Cramps in early pregnancy

It is normal to have **mild** cramps (like mild monthly bleeding cramps) at times during the first 3 months of pregnancy. These cramps happen because the womb is growing.

Cramps that are regular (come and go in a pattern) or constant (always there), are very strong or painful, or come with spotting or bleeding are warning signs. The woman may have a tubal pregnancy (see page 113) or may be having a miscarriage (see page 91). She should get medical help immediately.



Chapter 6: Common changes in pregnancy

**Baby's kicks hurt the mother**

Most of the baby's movements feel good. But sometimes babies kick very hard or always in the same place. And sometimes the baby's head bounces against the mother's back or bladder during the last weeks of pregnancy. These movements may make the mother sore or uncomfortable, but they are not harmful.



**WARNING!** The mother usually feels regular kicks every day by the 6th or 7th month. If the baby stops kicking for a few hours, it is OK. But **if the mother feels no movement for more than a day and a night, there may be a problem.** The mother should meet with her midwife or get medical help.

**Back pain**

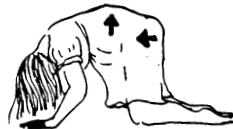
Many women get back pain. The weight of the baby, the womb, and the waters puts a strain on the woman's bones and muscles. Too much standing in one place or leaning forward can cause back pain. Hard work can also cause back pain. Most kinds of back pain are normal. But it can be caused by a kidney infection (see page 128).

Encourage husbands, children, other family members, or friends to massage the woman's back. A warm cloth or hot water bottle on her back may also feel good. Her family can also help by doing some of the heavy work (carrying small children, washing clothes, farming, and milling grain) for her.

A woman can also do an exercise — called the angry cat exercise — to reduce lower back pain. She should do this exercise several times in a row, 2 times a day, and whenever her back hurts her.



Start on hands and knees with the back flat.



Push the lower back up.



Return to flat back. Repeat.

**Leg cramps**

Many women get foot or leg cramps — sharp sudden pain and tightening of a muscle. These cramps especially come at night, or when women stretch and point their toes. To stop the cramp: flex the foot (point it upward) and then gently stroke the leg to help it relax (do not stroke hard).

See page 273 to learn when leg pain can be dangerous.

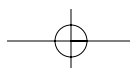
Point the toe up,



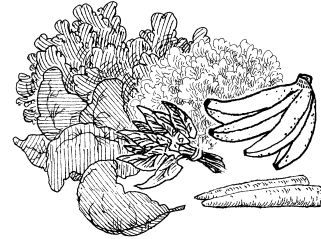
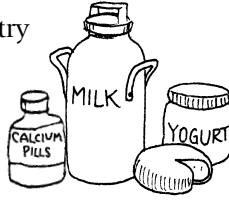
then stroke the leg.



Do not point the toe down.



To prevent more cramps, a woman should not point her toes (even when stretching), and she should eat more foods high in calcium and potassium. The woman can also try taking calcium, magnesium, and potassium pills.



Foods rich in calcium and potassium can help prevent leg cramps.

## Headaches

Headaches are common in pregnancy but are usually harmless. Headaches may stop if the mother rests and relaxes more, drinks more juice or water, or gently massages her temples. It is OK for a pregnant woman to take 2 paracetamol tablets with water once in a while.



Some women have migraine headaches. These are strong headaches, often on the side of the head. The woman may see spots and feel nauseated. Bright light or sunshine can make them worse. Migraines may get worse in pregnancy.

Unfortunately, migraine medicine is very dangerous in pregnancy. It can cause labor to start too soon, and it may also harm the baby. It is better for a pregnant woman with migraines to take 500 to 1000 milligrams paracetamol, and rest in a dark room. Although coffee and black tea are usually not healthy in pregnancy, they are OK occasionally and they may help cure a migraine.

**Headaches late in pregnancy are a warning sign of pre-eclampsia, especially if there is also high blood pressure or swelling of the face or hands.** See page 125.

## Other pains

It is common to have other small aches and pains during pregnancy. Get medical advice for pain that is not normal in pregnancy, such as:

- red, swollen joints.
- severe pain.
- signs of anemia with joint pain (see page 116 on anemia).



**WARNING!** If there is pain in one leg that will not go away, it may be a blood clot. See page 273 and get medical help.

## Changing feelings and emotions

Pregnancy is an important time in a woman's life. Her baby is growing inside her, her body is changing, and she needs more food and more rest. As a woman's body changes, her relationships, her sexuality, and her work life can change too.

### Sudden changes in feelings

Pregnancy can make women very emotional. Some women laugh or cry for no clear reason. Some feel depressed, angry, or irritable.

Odd laughing or crying and other sudden mood changes or strong feelings are normal. They usually pass quickly. But do not ignore a woman's feelings simply because she is pregnant. Her feelings are real.

### Worry and fear

Many women worry when they are pregnant, especially about the baby's health and about giving birth. A woman's worries about other problems in her life may also become stronger when she is pregnant.

Such worries are normal. They do **not** mean that something bad will happen. Women with these feelings need emotional support, like someone to listen to their worries and encourage them to feel hopeful. They may also need help to solve the problems they are having in their lives, like problems with their partners, money, drugs or alcohol, or other issues.



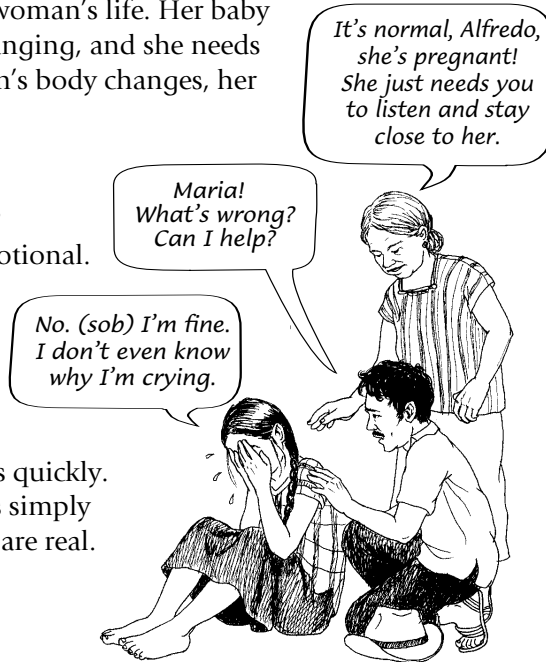
### Strange dreams and nightmares

Pregnant women may have strong, vivid dreams. They can be beautiful, strange, or frightening.

For many people, dreams are an important way of understanding themselves and the world. Some people believe that dreams can tell us about the future or give us messages from spirits.

But usually, when something happens in a dream, that does not mean that it will happen to us in life.

The events in the dream may be telling us what we are afraid of or what we desire. Or they may simply be stories our minds make up while we sleep. Women who are having frightening dreams may need someone to talk to about their hopes, fears, and feelings.





## Forgetfulness

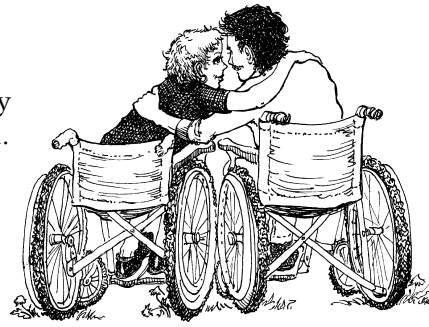
Some women forget things when they are pregnant. For most women, this is not a big problem. But some may worry if they do not know it is normal. No one knows why women become more forgetful when they are pregnant, but it is common.

## Feelings about sex

Some women do not want much sex when they are pregnant. Others want sex more than usual. Both feelings are normal. Having sex and not having sex are both OK for the woman and her baby. Sex is not dangerous for the baby.

Sometimes sex is uncomfortable in pregnancy. A woman and her partner can try different positions for making love. It may feel better with the woman on top, or in a sitting or standing position, or with the woman lying on her side.

There are other ways, besides sexual intercourse, for couples to be close and please each other. Some couples touch and massage each other's bodies. Some talk about hopes and fears together.



## Safer sex

When a pregnant woman has sex, it is important to avoid infection by making sure that anything put inside her body is clean. This includes the penis and hands.

A man who is having sex with more than one woman must **always** use condoms — including with his pregnant partner. Condoms are a good way to prevent infections, HIV/AIDS, and other illnesses. See Chapter 18, page 320 to learn more about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

### Sex and early labor

A woman who has gone into early labor in other pregnancies might choose to avoid sex after the 6th month. This may help prevent going into labor too early.



# Pregnancy

## INTRODUCTION

All women need care and attention during pregnancy. This care is usually called prenatal or antenatal care. Prenatal care helps pregnant women be healthier and have fewer problems in birth. Prenatal care should come from the woman herself, from her family and the community, and from a midwife or someone else who is experienced in helping pregnant women.



In some places, midwives only care for women when they are in labor or giving birth, not during pregnancy. This may be because most of the time, people only go to a healer or doctor when they are sick or if something is wrong. Pregnancy is usually normal and healthy, so people may not think that prenatal care is important. But most midwives know that women who have good care during pregnancy are more likely to have safer births and healthier babies.



### **Care in pregnancy has 2 purposes:**

1. **Observing and listening** to the pregnant woman by checking her body for healthy signs and warning signs and by asking her about problems or listening to her questions.
2. **Teaching** a woman how to have a healthier pregnancy (for example, how to eat a healthy diet and how to avoid harmful things).

Midwives should start prenatal care as soon as a woman knows she is pregnant, and should examine the woman regularly during the pregnancy. We call these meetings “checkups.” If possible, every woman should have at least 4 checkups.

Doing more checkups will give you more chances to share important information and to prevent health problems. And any woman who has warning signs should have checkups more often.

This section is divided into 3 different chapters:

- Chapter 6 explains the changes a woman may go through in pregnancy.
- Chapter 7 explains how to learn about a woman’s health history during the first checkup.
- Chapter 8 explains how to check a woman for healthy signs and warning signs at each checkup.

