

General Information on Pregnancy



Note: This information is intended for educational purposes only.

You should seek further advice and instruction from your chosen healthcare professional.

FIRST TRIMESTER

SECOND TRIMESTER

THIRD TRIMESTER

Conception to 4 Weeks

Less than 1cm long
Development of the spinal cord, nervous system, heart, lungs
The amniotic sac surrounds the baby

16 Weeks

30 cm long (approx)
Heartbeat is strong
Skin is thin
Has downy hair
Nails are forming
Arm and leg movements can be felt
Less than 1 cm long

28 weeks

36-40 cm long (approx)
Fat is forming
Baby is very active

8 Weeks

Less than 2.5 cm long
Baby's face is forming
Arms and legs are moving
Brain begins to form
Heartbeat can be detected with ultrasound

20 Weeks

28-36 cm long (approx)
Baby sucks its thumb
Has hair, brows and lashes
Prenatal reflexes are stronger
Prefers a particular position

32 weeks

40-46 cm long (approx)
Responds to sound (can recognise voices)
Has periods of sleep and alertness

12 Weeks

About 14 cm long
Baby can move its fingers and toes
Baby can smile, suck and frown and swallow
Sex of the baby can now be determined

24 Weeks

28-36 cm long (approx)
Skin is wrinkled and covered with a protective coating
Eyes are open (baby can see)
Baby has a strong grip

36 - 38 weeks

49 cm (approx)
Weighs approximately 6 lbs (2.72kg)
Downy hair is gone
Less active
Gaining immunities from mother

Hormonal fluctuations

It is during what is commonly referred to as 'childbearing' years that a woman's body prepares for a pregnancy each month. Hormones (also referred to as 'messengers') are sent from the hypothalamus and pituitary glands. These glands are situated at the base of your brain. These 'messengers' will let your brain know if a sperm has connected with an egg. If this egg is fertilised then oestrogen and progesterone levels increase until the placenta is developed to the point where it can take over for the duration of the pregnancy. The levels of progesterone and oestrogen increase during the first 12-14 weeks of the pregnancy and it is during this time that women can experience changes to their moods, nausea and be far more sensitive (from an emotional point of view).

Your emotions can inhibit the production of these hormones (oestrogen and progesterone) so it is a good idea to look after your mind and body right from the beginning so that you will feel confident leading up to and during the birth. A great way to help manage your pregnancy and prepare for birth is a combination of gentle exercise, meditation, massage and attending educational classes to learn about your pregnancy and the birthing process.

Meditation

Meditation is a calming, mental exercise. It is undertaken by people of all ages and circumstances to reduce stress, tension, anxiety and pain. Try finding a local meditation class or practise at home for 15 - 20 minutes a day using the following technique:

Find a quiet space and time and wear loose, comfortable clothing. Focus on your breath; find a word (mantra) that you like (i.e. thank you or 'OM'). If it's easier, focus on an image (i.e. candle or photo). Allow thoughts to float on by.

Do a Body Scan (example only)

Two to three weeks before labour, do a 'body scan'. Close your eyes and starting at the toes, feel where you are holding tension - then release the area of tension by a 'relax' command. From the toes go to the feet, then leg and back and then all the way to the top of your head.

Further reading:

Creating Health - How to wake up the body's intelligence. Deepak Chopra. Houghton Mifflin Co, 1995.

Breath Sweeps Mind: A first guide to meditation practice. Jean Smith (ed) Riverhead Bood, 1998

Exercise

Yoga is great because it includes breathing exercises; addresses your body posture and meditation. In Yoga, Prana (life force) breathing technique is used. This allows your body to open up and receive universal energies; body postures will stretch and strengthen muscles that improve posture, relax organs and nerves. When it comes to meditation it will allow the mind to become focused yet 'quiet' and will relax the body. There are specific yoga classes for pregnancy and childbirth preparation.

Alternatives to Yoga

Other forms of exercise most beneficial to pregnant women include swimming and walking. Avoid heavy exercise during the first 15 weeks after conception. This is when the placenta attaches itself to the wall of the uterus.

Childbirth Education classes

Childbirth education classes can offer help for both you and your partner by providing an informative, positive and supportive environment. Attending these classes is important as they:

- Give you the opportunity to meet other people who are also in the same situation.
- Build the confidence you have in your body as you understand that your body was designed to give birth.
- Help you develop skills to meet labour with excitement and trust.

Kinesiology

Kinesiology is a unique healing modality in that it relies upon an individual's own innate healing power and allows one to get below the surface of symptoms. It identifies stressors using simple muscle testing and uses feedback to facilitate changes. Some of the healing tools that Holistic Kinesiology uses are: Acupressure, Chakra balancing, Lymphatic, Neurovascular and Meridian stimulation, Flower essences, Crystals and Aurasoma.

Kinesiology is particularly useful for trauma and emotionally challenging events in life that have manifested as Physical symptoms.