

MINOR DISORDERS IN PREGNANCY

Common complaints refer to the minor ailments of pregnancy experienced by most pregnant women. Though these ailments do not necessarily endanger life, they could be of such intensity as to make the patient's life miserable.

Some of the complaints are:

MORNING SICKNESS

This is one of the earliest symptoms of pregnancy. The patient feels nauseated on rising in the morning. She may actually vomit or have nausea with excessive salivation. At times these symptoms persist throughout the day and may impair the patient's appetite. Since no specific cause is known and some women have been known to go through pregnancy without vomiting. It is reasonable to advise the patient to avoid those things which tend to nauseate her.

Taking easily digestible food and getting out slowly from bed have been known to be helpful. It is important to avoid starvation and dehydration and deficiency of serum electrolytes consequently on vomiting. There is need to eat food rich in vitamins and mineral salts as well as what she fancies at frequent intervals.

An adequate fluid intake is also necessary. A balanced diet seems to be better tolerated than greasy and fried food. In some women, morning sickness usually stops after the 14th week of pregnancy. It is very important for pregnant women to appreciate the risk of taking drugs not prescribed by the doctor. Some drugs are dangerous to the mother and the developing baby.

HEARTBURN

Heartburn is a burning sensation in the mediasterum (heart) due to the effect of hydrochloric acid on the oesophagus. The cardiac sphincter of the stomach is relaxed as a result of the effect of the progesterone.

It is advisable to sit up for some time after meals and sleep with extra pillows at night. Licking of peppermint and sips of milk and water are known to give some relief. Antacids such as magnesium trisilicate and milk of magnesia are sometimes prescribed for stubborn cases. Eating little food at frequent intervals to avoid over-distension of the stomach or eating greasy indigestible food.

CONSTIPATION

Constipation is a common disorder in pregnancy because of the relaxing effect of progesterone on the muscle of the intestinal wall. Adequate intake of fluid, fruits and vegetables can prevent it. Where drugs have to be given, a mild aperients e.g. milk of magnesia should be prescribed. Stronger purgatives must never be prescribed as they may cause abortion or premature labour.

VARICOSE VEINS AND HAEMORRHOIDS

These are engorged superficial veins on the legs, the vulva and the anus.

The anal ones are known as hemorrhoids. At times, they are harmless. If they are painful, oedematous and tend to ulcerate, medical advice must be sought immediately. The causes (aetiology) of the varicose vein are due to relaxing of progesterone on the muscles. Prolonged standing tends to worsen varicose veins. Therefore, the patient is advised to avoid standing for long periods. The affected leg could be bandaged with crepe bandage from below upwards before getting out of bed in the morning and the bandage must be removed at night. The leg should be elevated when the patient is resting or sitting and there should be free movement of the ankle to encourage good circulation of the blood.

ITCHING

Itching of the body could be caused by striae gravidarum, poor personal hygiene, heat rash and minor skin disease. Regular daily baths and generous application of calamine lotion or talcum powder could be soothing to the skin.

Itching of the vulva or pruritus vulvae could be caused by trichomonas vaginitis and moniliasis although poor personal hygiene is a contributory factor.

FAINING AND GIDDINESS

Fainting and giddiness could occur as a result of anaemia, cardiac impairment, sudden change in posture e.g. from lying to sitting position or standing for long periods in the sun. Crowded and stuffy rooms could also dispose the fainting.

GLOSSITIS AND GINGIVITIS

Glossitis and gingivitis are fairly common amongst pregnant women of low income class. They occur as a result of inadequate Vitamins (especially Vitamin B) and calcium intake as well as poor oral hygiene. The patient finds it difficult to eat, they become underfed as well as mal-nourished and anaemia may occur. Glossitis can be cured by routine administration of vitamin B Complex and by encouraging the patient to eat food and fruits rich in vitamin B and calcium such as green vegetables, eggs, cheese, etc. Gingivitis is relieved by improvement in oral hygiene.

BACKACHE AND JOINT PAINS

Backache and joints pains are common in tired multiparous women with bad posture. Rest and assumption of a good posture and use of sensible shoes may ease the pains. At times, the back pain may be associated with pyelonephritis or when the uterus is heavy and the joints are relaxed, the patient is reassured and encouraged to rest.

FREQUENCY OF MICTURITION

During first 12 weeks of pregnancy, before the uterus rises out of the pelvis, there is slightly increased pressure on the bladder. The same applies in late pregnancy with the foetal head sinking into the pelvis. The patient's sleep is disturbed and she should be encouraged to sleep in the afternoon to make up for the poor night's sleep.

INSOMNIA

Insomnia may occur anytime but it is more usual in late pregnancy. Simple measures like a warm bath at night, a drink of a warm beverage, and sleeping in a cool airy room should help. If these are not working, a doctor should be consulted to order a sedative if necessary.

CRAMPS

Cramps usually in the leg are quite common. It has been attributed to deficiency in vitamin B, calcium and extra amounts of these substances are sometimes prescribed.