Pregnancy Q&A

Answers to most commonly asked questions about pregnancy
Congratulations!

We are happy to congratulate you on becoming pregnant! You are now entering a wonderful journey to parenthood. This 9-month journey will bring new experiences, thoughts, emotions, memories and especially love. We wish you the best and hope this booklet will answer some of your questions about pregnancy.

“Remember, what your baby really needs is a healthy, happy and a relaxed mother” Dr Steen 2011

Enjoy your pregnancy!
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A healthy pregnancy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy diet</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight fluctuations</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms of pregnancy</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movements of the baby</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medications</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping during pregnancy</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling during pregnancy</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish maternity clinic system</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional beliefs about pregnancy in Russian and Somali cultures</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful contacts</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now is the perfect time to start discovering about pregnancy
A healthy pregnancy

What is a healthy pregnancy?

Having a baby can be one of the most exciting experiences you will face in life but it can also be intimidating, especially to first-time pregnant women. There is so much to learn about pregnancy and parenthood, therefore it is good to start familiarizing yourself with pregnancy and its different stages already from the beginning.

During the next 9 months your body will go through enormous amount of changes in a relatively short period of time. Therefore, it is important to understand what these changes are to ensure that you have a healthy pregnancy. The average pregnancy lasts for approximately 40 weeks and these weeks are divided into three trimesters.
First trimester (weeks 0-14)

During the first trimester your body is busy developing both the baby and placenta. The baby’s body and organs are formed in this stage. Especially during the first 8 weeks it is important for the woman to be careful and to avoid substances that can harm the development of the fetus, such as alcohol, tobacco and certain medicines. The fetus is most sensitive to external influences during this period of pregnancy.

You should try to avoid strenuous sports and let your body get all the rest it needs. It is normal to feel tired during the early stages of pregnancy due to the rising levels of progesterone. Your body also tries to adjust to both physical and emotional demands. Therefore, you should not be worried if you do not have the same energy you used to have.

Other changes you may feel in the early stages of the pregnancy are bloating of the breast, a lack of appetite and morning sickness. These symptoms are normal and usually last for the duration of first trimester.
- Second trimester (weeks 14-28)

You are now experiencing the middle stage of your pregnancy. During this stage your pregnancy should be well established and nausea and fatigue will lessen considerably.

Most women feel the baby’s movements for the first time during weeks 15-22. This is the time when the baby starts to move its limbs and exercise its muscles.

When having an ultrasound around week 18 it is possible to determine the sex of the baby.

At week 28 your baby will be about 37cm long and weigh about 1kg.

Attending the antenatal classes begins during the second trimester. If you still have not started exercising, it is recommended to start now.
Now you are at the last stage of your pregnancy. Your abdomen will be getting bigger and your body will be getting ready for delivery. Gaining weight is part of the healthy pregnancy and you should not be worried about it. The amount of weight women gain is individual, so you should not compare your weight with the weight gained by other expecting women.

During the last stage of pregnancy your baby will start to put on weight rapidly. The baby’s movements will get stronger and the baby will be able to distinguish light from dark and recognize your voice. Around week 36 the baby may shift into a head-down position to get ready for birth.
You might experience breathlessness, swollen legs and insomnia at the last stage of your pregnancy.

You might also need the toilet more often and get tired more easily. It is normal to experience these symptoms at the end of your pregnancy. It is now important that you do not strain your body and you let it prepare for childbirth.
Food triangle: Finnish nutritional recommendations
2014 by the Finnish Governmental Nutritional Council
Healthy diet

Why is a healthy, balanced diet important during pregnancy?

The quality of nutrition during pregnancy is extremely vital for the well-being of both the pregnant woman and for the child’s cognitive and neural development. It also has an effect on the gestational length.

Moreover, maternal nutrition affects the well-being of the baby for a long period of time. Healthy diet ensures sufficient nutritional intake and assists in preventing baby’s risk factors.

A balanced diet covers the increased need of energy, vitamins and minerals that are needed for the growth of the fetus, uterus and the placenta. They are also vital for the formation of the amniotic fluid. Furthermore, they improve the quality of sleep, immunity and ability to cope with stress.
What does a healthy, balanced diet consist of?

According to the general nutritional recommendations, the pregnancy diet consists of a rich variety of food, including: whole grains, plenty of vegetables, berries, fruits, dairy products, fish, meat and eggs.

It is advisable to eat plenty of vegetables, even more than half a kilogram per every day and the best drink for thirst is water. The recommended amount of liquids consumed should be a minimum of 2 liters per day including liquid foods, such as soups and yogurts. You should always aim to be hydrated.

It is important to eat regularly. It prevents some of the possible concerns that can be met during the pregnancy. Regular meal times should include: proper breakfast, lunch, snack, dinner and supper.

Each meal should consist of a variety of nutrients and vitamins.
Fats

During pregnancy the need for essential fatty acids increases and the sufficient intake of them ensures normal development of the nervous system and the vision of the fetus.

Especially, the quality of fats is important for the normal development of the fetus. In order to ensure the ideal quality of fats it is recommended to use vegetable oils, vegetable margarines and variety of fish. Almond, nuts and seeds are also sources of good fats.

At the same time reducing the intake of hard fats is vital. It is healthier to choose fat-free dairy products, low-fat cheese and cold cuts.

Proteins

The protein requirement for pregnant women composes of 1-1,5 g per kg of body weight.

Some good protein sources for pregnant women are: chicken breast, salmon, cottage cheese, almonds, skimmed and sour milk, eggs, soybeans and tofu.
Carbohydrates and fiber

The daily requirement of carbohydrates is 150-300 grams and fiber 25-35 grams.

You can get sufficient amount of them by eating daily whole wheat and whole grain products and liquid dairy products. Fruits, berries and vegetables are also good sources of carbohydrates and fiber.

In order to increase the intake of fiber it is good to add brans, dried fruits and malt extract into your meals. Sufficient intake of fiber together with plenty of water is a good method in preventing and treating constipation.

Calcium

The pregnant woman’s need for calcium increases for the development of fetal bones. If the woman does not receive enough of calcium from her diet, it releases from her bones into the bloodstream, so that the fetal calcium intake will be ensured. You can get sufficient amount of calcium (900 mg) by drinking 6 dL of liquid dairy products and consuming 30 g of the cheese.
Should supplements be used during pregnancy?

There are different supplements that are recommended if your diet is not diverse enough. Some supplements should also be taken by every pregnant woman in addition to her healthy, balanced diet. Below are listed the most commonly used supplements.

Vitamin-D

During pregnancy and lactation vitamin-D is needed to promote the absorption of calcium and the development and growth of the fetal bones. The best sources of vitamin-D are fish, vitaminized dairy products and margarines.

Even a balanced diet does not cover the increased need for vitamin-D, therefore vitamin-D supplements are highly recommended to be used by every pregnant woman. You should consume at least 10 micrograms of vitamin-D daily all year round.
Iron

The need for iron multiplies during pregnancy because of the increase of red blood cells. Iron is also needed for the placental growth and the iron storages. As the pregnancy progresses the need for iron increases.

There are two types of iron: absorbable iron, which is found in meat, bloody foods and fish, and less-absorbable iron, which is found in grains and vegetables. To increase the absorption of iron it is recommended to eat foods that are rich in vitamin-C. Examples of such foods are: fresh berries and fruits.

If you have iron deficiency, iron supplements are usually added to your diet. The dairy products or calcium supplements and iron rich foods or supplements should be consumed during separate meal times. This will ensure the best absorption of iron.
Folate

Folate, also known as folic acid is essential for the healthy development of the baby’s nervous system. The extra need for the folic acid can be met by a healthy and balanced diet.

Folate is a group-B vitamin and it is found in foods such as fresh green vegetables, fruits, berries and whole grain products. You should consume about 500 micrograms of folate per day.

Folate deficiency can occur if the woman has a one-sided diet or difficult vegetable-fruit allergies. Certain medical conditions and medications also affect the folate deficiency. In case of a folate deficiency, the use of a supplement is highly recommended and the dosage should be determined by a health care professional.

For every woman it is recommended to take 0,4 mg of folic acid vitamins until the twelfth gestational week. During the early stage of pregnancy the fetal body forms and it is important to take the vitamin already from the beginning of pregnancy in order to ensure adequate folate levels.
**Calcium**

*If you have a low-lactose or lactose-free diet you need additional calcium supplements. Young age also increases the need for extra calcium.*

*In case you have a special diet such as: celiac, have several food allergies or are lactose intolerant it is good to consult a nutritionist to ensure your nutritional diversity. Vegetarians should also make sure that their nutritional intake includes enough protein and calcium.*

*Other supplements, such as omega-3-fatty acid (fish oil) and lactic acid bacteria may defend the baby from allergies by strengthening its immune system.*

*Before using any supplements make sure to consult a health care professional.*
Is it safe to consume sweet and spicy foods?

Sweets should be consumed only in small amounts, since they take up space needed for healthy food and make you gain excess weight easily.

You can use sugar in moderate amounts as part of a balanced diet. For instance, enjoying a small dessert daily or having a small piece of pie 1-2 times per week is not harmful. You can also eat daily 25-50 g of dark chocolate or muesli or a fruit bar.

Good alternatives for sweets are tooth-friendly xylitol gum and pastilles. In addition to sugar, artificial sweeteners that are safe to use during pregnancy are: aspartame, acesulfame and sucralose.

When making your food it is safe to use herbs and ginger. If you have cravings of spicy and salty food, replace salt with mineral salt or alternatively with spices and herbs. You can also use ingredients such as chili and hot peppers in moderation.

There are no indications that spicy food is harmful to the baby, but it is good to use spices carefully. They can provoke unpleasant symptoms, such as stomach discomfort and heartburn.
What foods should be avoided?

You should try to avoid these foods as they may present a variety of hazards:

- beef, pork and chicken liver are not recommended because they contain a great amount of vitamin-A and heavy metals
- unpasteurized soft or blue cheese for instance goat’s cheese and brie, which can contain listeria
- raw or partially cooked eggs, including mayonnaise which can contain salmonella
- raw or undercooked meat, fish and poultry, which can contain salmonella
- ready-to-eat-salads in bags, which carry a risk of listeria
- seaweed products and morels
- too much oily fish, which can contain pollutants and chemicals
- fish from the Baltic sea such as large herring or salmon are allowed to eat only 1-2 times in month due to their harmful environmental poisons.

Try avoiding very salty foods like chips, olives, pickles and salty nuts. Try also not to consume a great amount of liquorice and salmiak due to its high content of glycyrrhizin.

Beverages that contain sugar are harmful for teeth and they should be consumed in moderation.
What are some examples of healthy snacks?

Having healthy snacks is important to keep your blood sugar stable and relieve unpleasant feelings, such as nausea. You can enjoy a variety of berries and vegetables as a good snack almost limitlessly.

Some good examples of snacks that are rich in protein are: oat meal, cottage cheese, boiled eggs, yogurts and sandwiches with slices of cheese and meat. Fruits can also be a good snack, but remember that some of them are high in sugar. Therefore you should consume them only one to three times a day.

If you are feeling nauseous, taking ice cold juice or ice cream can relieve the symptoms.

While grocery shopping, try making a rainbow of fruits and vegetables in your shopping cart.

Do your groceries have all the colors of the rainbow?
Weight fluctuations

How does your weight fluctuate during pregnancy?

It is estimated that a pregnant woman can gain anything from zero to about 20 kg during pregnancy, with an average weight gain of 10-12 kg. Most of the weight gain occurs after week 20.

The amount of weight you gain is individual and differs with every woman; therefore weight gain alone is not a good indicator of how well the baby is growing.

Gaining more than 20 kg can expose you to gestational diabetes and it can cause overgrowth of the fetus. Losing the excess weight gained during pregnancy becomes relatively hard after the baby is born.

The normal weight gain at the end of pregnancy consists of:

- the baby weighing 3-4 kg
- the womb 1kg
- amniotic fluid 0.5-1kg
- the placenta 0.5 kg
- breasts 0.4 kg
- mother’s blood volume increases by 1.2 kg
- the rest, approximately 4 kg, comes from the excess fat tissues and fluid retention.
What if there is no weight gain during pregnancy?

Each woman gains weight according to her individual metabolism and individual needs. Therefore it is possible that you do not gain weight during the early stages of your pregnancy.

If your weight does not start to increase after the first trimester, it might be a sign that your baby is not growing properly. It is important to seek a health professional’s help to ensure that the baby is growing and the pregnancy is proceeding in a healthy manner.

Is it normal to lose weight during pregnancy?

It is normal for some women to actually lose weight during pregnancy because of morning sickness and aversions to food. If it happens to you, do not panic. Your weight will start to increase once your morning sickness eases and your appetite improves.
How to deal with swelling and stretch marks?

During your pregnancy your body retains fluids to soften your body making it easier for it to stretch as your baby grows and for labor. Some of these extra fluids may collect in your feet and hands causing them to swell.

To help alleviate the swelling, avoid standing for long periods of time and wearing clothes that are tight around your ankles and wrists. Resting with your feed up also relieves the swelling.

As your baby grows your body will grow with it causing it to stretch. After birth, stretch marks usually fade and become far less noticeable. There are some creams and oils that are believed to help prevent and fade stretch marks, but there is no evidence that they work.
Use light hand weights to stay flexible.

To ensure your safety a Pilates exercise ball should be used under the supervision of an accredited instructor.
Physical activity

What are the benefits of doing sports during pregnancy?

Exercising during pregnancy helps to maintain and improve the fitness of the woman. It might prevent the excessive weight gain of both the woman and the baby. Moreover, it decreases the baby’s risk of childhood obesity.

Exercising can decrease some of the possible uncomfortable symptoms during pregnancy, such as: constipation, tiredness, swelling of the feet and appearance of the varicose veins. Studies have shown that exercising regularly while pregnant can enhance self-esteem, decrease anxiety and symptoms of depression. It also improves the mood and quality of sleep of the pregnant woman.

Eating a healthy, balanced diet together with a regular physical activity can prevent the onset of gestational diabetes. It improves the glucose metabolism and it might reduce the need for insulin, if the diabetes is already present.

Doing regular physical activity safely promotes the health and wellness of the woman during and after the pregnancy.
What forms of exercise are safe during the pregnancy?

Recommended forms of exercising include: walking, Nordic walking, jogging, gymnastics, swimming, water running, aerobics, skiing, skating, cycling, rowing, dancing and exercising in the gym.

Swimming is especially recommended during pregnancy because it supports the weight of the pregnant woman and it is one method of relaxation. It also promotes flexibility of the body, but does not put pressure on the joints.

Pilates and yoga are ideal for pregnancy. Pilates strengthens both abdominal and pelvic floor muscles, without placing tension on the woman’s joints or the back. By engaging in Pilates exercises you can improve your posture and blood circulation.

According to research findings, women who practice yoga, have reduced risk of going into premature labor and developing high blood pressure. Yoga exercises place emphasis on the right breathing technique, which can be a very beneficial skill to maintain during labor.

It is important to remember that the center of gravity and your balance change during the course of pregnancy. Therefore, doing balance exercises are found to be beneficial.
In case of an uncomplicated pregnancy it is recommended to implement moderate-intensity activity for at least 30 minutes 5 times per week. In total the physical activity in a week should be a minimum of two and half hours.

If it is possible, it is good to lose excessive weight already before the pregnancy. It can prevent the onset of gestational diabetes and high blood pressure.

If you have not engaged in exercising before getting pregnant, it is important to start gradually and gently. At the beginning for about 15 minutes per day on the average 3 days in a week.

It is especially important to train larger muscle groups, such as: the back, thighs and abdomen muscles. By doing pelvic-floor exercises, it is possible to prevent symptoms of urine incontinence, which are common at the later stage of pregnancy and after giving birth.

Most pregnant women experience backache, especially at the end stage of pregnancy and it can be relieved by physiotherapy, acupuncture and water aerobics. Backache occurs due to the loosening of ligaments and this happens due to the excretion of the hormone relaxin. Increased levels of relaxin loosen ligaments and joints making them less stable.
It is essential to drink a lot of water during exercise. It promotes perspiration and body’s temperature regulation. The body should always stay hydrated.

The physical activity of a healthy woman does not have harmful effects on the baby’s development and it does not increase the risk of premature labor. According to research findings, exercising during pregnancy does not affect the duration of labor or the amount of Cesarean sections.

There are some forms of activities, which should be avoided. Such types are: scuba diving, high-risk sports, such as horse riding, downhill skiing, snowboarding, waterskiing, martial art training, heavy weightlifting and activities that involve standing in one place for a long period of time.

Exercises that involve lying on the abdomen should also be avoided as they might cause the womb to be compressed.

You should keep in mind that there are some reasons for discontinuing physical activity. Some examples of them are: breathlessness, dizziness, extreme fatigue, chest pain, swelling and pain of the legs, severe headache, vaginal bleeding, strong and painful contractions and suspicion of breaking the amniotic fluid.
Until what stage can sports be practiced?

It is recommended to keep up physical activity from the beginning throughout the course of pregnancy according to your condition. However, after gestational week 16 it is recommended to avoid exercising on the back.

Especially in the later stage of pregnancy it is good to practice breathing and relaxation techniques. Pregnancy yoga provides good examples of them.

Can I work during pregnancy?

It is safe to continue working if you are healthy and there have been no indications of problems in your pregnancy thus far.

If there are some complications in pregnancy or the woman is diagnosed with a disease which requires rest or prevents working, the woman can receive sick leave. The need for sick leave is according to the physician’s assessment.

In most jobs and companies it is possible to continue working during pregnancy. However, it is important to remember that there are some potential risks for the woman and the baby. Therefore, adjustments should be made to increase the safety of the woman.
The first trimester of pregnancy is the most sensitive time from the perspective of the fetal development. Possible risks related to the work tasks and environment should be evaluated before the pregnancy or at least during the first weeks of pregnancy.

The pregnant woman should remember that she has special privileges according to her condition. There are strict guidelines supporting her rights during pregnancy and it is good to familiarize yourself with them already in the beginning.
Examples of what to avoid:

- chemicals, such as those used in medical, dental or pharmaceutical professions, also painting, cleaning, farming, dry-cleaning, gardening, beauty salons, pest-control and more. The safety data on every chemical, which is in contact with the pregnant woman, should be checked
- awkward spaces, work stations and slippery floors
- working with animals, whose waste, bodies and surroundings may carry E.coli, can cause tularemia, toxoplasmosis, and may carry other disease-causing organisms
- food hazards, such as listeria, E.coli and salmonella, which can be acquired by handling raw food
- viral hazards, for instance in medical environments or even childcare facilities, where the woman may come into contact with viruses, including childhood illnesses, which may be harmful to unborn baby
- heavy lifting
- long hours of standing or sitting
- radioactive rays, for instance from repeated exposure to x-rays.
If you stand during the day for long periods of time, multiple and regular breaks should be taken. It is beneficial to take the time to do a few stretching exercises and keep the feet up on a footstool as often as possible.

In certain circumstances the pregnant woman has the right to ask for changes in her work environment or can ask for sick leave by a physician. Such circumstances are:

- night shifts, excessive working hours, late shifts
- strikes, low frequency vibration and uncomfortable movements
- long-term manual handling of heavy loads. The manual handling of heavy loads can increase the risk of premature labor. The risk depends on the weight of the loads, technique of lifting and the amount of lifting times. The risk can be reduced by decreasing the amount of physical work and by using auxiliary tools for handling the loads
- noise (≥ 85 dB)
- extreme temperatures (≤ -18 °C or ≥ 35 °C)
- sitting or standing for a long period of time, bad working posture
- working at height.
According to the Finnish Health insurance act the pregnant woman has the right to receive special maternity support, if work tasks or work environment is related to exposure to chemical substances, radiation, contagious diseases or something else which hazards the health of the woman or her baby.

The precondition for receiving the special maternity support is that the pregnant woman should be able-bodied and there is no other work offered by the employer, so that she should be out of work due to certain risks.

What is the recommended time to go on maternity leave?

The maternity leave starts about a month before the due date.

The employer of the pregnant woman should be notified about pregnancy at least 15 weeks before the due date. But, it is a good idea to let him/her know about it as soon as the woman knows about the pregnancy, so that all plans relating to work tasks could be done in advance.

In addition, all changes to keep work environment safe for the pregnant woman should be made as soon as possible.
Symptoms of pregnancy

Is it normal to experience morning sickness?

It is normal to experience morning sickness usually during the first trimester, but with some women it can last for longer and in some cases for the whole pregnancy.

The reason behind morning sickness and nausea during pregnancy is still unknown but it is associated with hormonal changes. Remember to eat regularly to stay healthy and well-nourished during your pregnancy.

The symptoms of morning sickness can be relieved if you take a rusk and drink juice before getting up from bed.
Is it normal to feel lower abdominal pain?

The most common reason for abdominal pain is the ligaments in your abdomen stretching as your uterus grows. Constipation also can cause pain in the lower abdomen.

Having a warm bath and putting a hot water bottle against your abdomen is said to help relieve the pain. Instead of always taking medication it is good to try more natural ways to relieve pain, as it is safer for the unborn baby.

Is it normal to have constipation?

The pregnancy hormones that are slowing down your metabolism often cause constipation. To avoid it, it is important to have a well-balanced and healthy diet throughout your pregnancy. Iron supplements can also cause constipation. In this case it is good to consult a health care professional.

Try eating food that is rich in fiber, fresh fruits and vegetables to help relieve the constipation.
Is it normal to have urine incontinence?

Your baby and your enlarged uterus put pressure on your pelvic floor muscles and bladder. Therefore, extra pressure from coughing or laughing can make the muscles around the opening of your bladder to give way causing some urine to leak.

Already from the first trimester, you will feel the need to urinate more frequently because of the increased urine production of the kidneys. The frequent need to urinate lasts for the entire pregnancy and usually becomes even more frequent towards the end of the pregnancy.

Doing pelvic exercises and emptying your bladder regularly will help prevent urine incontinence.
Is it normal to have vaginal bleeding and discharge?

Bleeding from your vagina, no matter how slight, is always a cause for a check up. Not all bleeding is serious or need treatment but some do. Therefore, if you notice any bleeding, make sure to contact a health care professional to ensure that everything is fine with you and the baby.

What does it mean if there is leakage of amniotic fluid?

Amniotic fluid is the substance which surrounds the fetus as it grows in the uterus. The fetus may move about in this fluid, but it prevents the wall of the uterus from contracting too tightly around the growing baby. The fluid also acts as a cushion that protects the fetus from harm.

Leaking amniotic fluid may be a sign that the woman is preparing to deliver. It can also be a sign that there is a condition present that can pose a risk for the growing baby. Immediate treatment will be necessary if it is determined that the woman is leaking amniotic fluid.
Is it common to have gestational acne?

Pregnancy can trigger acne or make existing adult acne worse because of the higher hormone levels. The acne can be mild, moderate, or even severe, and it can occur at any time during pregnancy.

There is not anything you can do to avoid it but there are some measures you can take to make it better. Wash your face gently with a cleanser twice a day and use oil-free moisturizers and makeup products.

There are also some medicinal creams that can be used to alleviate the symptoms of the acne; these medications can be used topically. The ones that are safe to be used during pregnancy are: benzoyl peroxide, clindamycin and azelaic acid. You should always consult a health care professional before using medicinal creams during pregnancy.
Is it usual to have mood swings?

It is likely that a pregnant woman might suffer from mood swings due to changes in her hormone levels. You can find yourself dealing with sudden mood swings ranging from mild to severe. These usually last only for the first trimester but it is possible to experience them for longer.

To help alleviate mood swings try to talk with somebody close to you. Talking about your worries can help relieve them. Stress concerning the pregnancy and the unborn baby is not healthy, therefore try to take it easy and relax.
Do activities that you like and make you feel good. For instance, you can read books, go shopping, go for a walk or even take a nap. Exercising and diet have also been found to have a connection with mood swings. Therefore, try to eat healthily and get enough exercise.

The best way to alleviate your mood swings is to take care of yourself overall. This way you will feel good about yourself and dealing with emotions becomes easier.
Movements of the baby

When it is normal to feel baby’s first movements?

Usually around weeks 15-22 you can expect to feel some first flutters or a bubbling sensation, and it will feel much like “having a goldfish flipping around inside your abdomen”.

As the baby becomes a little older, the pregnant woman usually feels the increase in the baby’s activity. You can notice that much of the baby’s movements occur at night when you are at rest. During the day, when you are active, your movements lull the baby to sleep, so when you relax the baby may wake up.

You can experience different sensations because the baby is able to already do quite versatile tricks such as: punch kicks, turns and wriggles or tugging and swinging on its own umbilical cord.

At week 20 the baby’s hearing is well developed and it may jump or jerk as a response to loud voices. The baby may react to various external stimuli by moving, flapping its eyes and by increasing the heartrate.
“Studies have shown that by the 24th week of pregnancy the baby’s heart rate increases in response to the mother’s stroking or patting the abdomen” Dr Mary Steen 2011.

The baby’s peak activity time is around week 32 and you will be able to feel definite movements as your baby becomes bigger and there is less space for it to move inside the womb. You can also notice your abdomen move as the baby’s knees, head, elbows and feet shift around as the baby makes itself comfortable.

At week 36 the baby may shift into a head-down position and you may feel stabs and wallops into your ribcage as the baby navigates its space. Especially at this time you can tell whether your baby is sleeping or awake.

At week 40 you should still feel regular movements of the baby, although they may be smaller.
What if suddenly there are no movements felt by the woman?

During third trimester you may find that the baby becomes less active than it has been. Women sometimes do panic and worry about it as the baby slows down. It happens because there is less room for it to move and there is usually no need to be concerned.

If you do not feel movements at the time when your baby is usually most active, you can try to sit quietly for a while and drink a glass of iced water. By doing this, your bladder fills up with cold liquid and it should give the baby a nudge and may provoke some movements.

In the later stage of pregnancy if the movements of the baby are rarefied, it is good to follow them more frequently. It is recommended to check for movements when you are at rest and during the time when the baby is active.

When you are following the movements you can write down how often the baby moves, noticeably, in an hour. The objective is to feel minimum of 10 movements per hour. If it is less than 10, you should continue observations for the next hour. If you still do not feel 10 movements per hour, it is advisable to contact the maternity clinic to check the baby’s condition the same day.
Can medications be used during pregnancy?

There may come a time during your pregnancy when you are feeling under the weather and are not sure if you can take your regular over-the-counter medication.

When taking medications during your pregnancy there should always be a clear indication for it. From the beginning of week 5 to the end of week 10, starting from your last menstruation, avoid using medications because the fetus is at its most sensitive stage and medications can cause it harm.

There are some medications that are safe to take during pregnancy. However, there are others that are not, or their effects on your baby may not be known. Make sure to ask a health care professional what medications are fine to take during your pregnancy and what are not.
Paracetamol is primarily used as pain medication and it is proven to be safe to use during all stages of pregnancy.

Ibuprofen is primarily used as an anti-inflammatory medication and it is safe to use during most stages of pregnancy. It is important to remember that using anti-inflammatory medication is not recommended during the early stages of pregnancy and after gestational week 28 because of the possible hazards it can cause to the baby.
Can herbal medications be used?

Most herbal remedies and supplements have not been proven to be safe during pregnancy because there is not sufficient amount of research done on their effects on the baby. Therefore, it is good to avoid using them.

Generally, you should avoid taking any medication while pregnant unless it is necessary, be it herbal or non-herbal medication. Make sure to always ask a health care professional for guidance and additional information before taking any medication.
Discover some cozy pregnancy pillows and remember, that you are sleeping for two now!
Sleeping during pregnancy

Why is sleep important during pregnancy?

Getting a lot of good quality sleep helps to cope with many emotional and physical challenges encountered during pregnancy. Moreover, it will help you maintain a positive attitude and your energy level.

Getting enough rest is extremely important during your pregnancy. If you are having difficulties in getting enough sleep during the night, you can try taking a nap during the day. Always listen to your own body and sleep if you are feeling tired.

Usually pregnant women need more sleep than they did before pregnancy. Ideally you need at least 8 hours of good quality sleep at night. You should remember that it is extremely important to get plenty of restful sleep and be prepared for the life with a newborn.
What are the recommended sleeping positions during pregnancy?

As the womb gets bigger and heavier, you can place a pillow between your legs to provide support for the hips. It is also good to wedge a pillow under the lower back to relieve pressure on that area.

It is advisable to sleep on the left side. It relieves pressure on the major blood vessels that supply oxygen and nutrients to the baby. You can try to use one pillow to comfortably support the abdomen, one for the back and another to gently lift the thigh and knee. It can ease minor aches and pains and promote a more restful sleep.

It is recommended to invest in some good, firm pillows that will help you support the growing womb and make you feel comfortable.
After week 16 it is good to avoid sleeping on your back, because in this position the womb places pressure on the larger vessels returning to the heart, which may provoke the feeling of nausea and may lower the oxygen supply to the baby.

The environment in which you sleep is especially important and the bedroom should be quiet and a comfortable temperature.
It is not too late to go for a holiday even if you are pregnant.

Try to relax and enjoy your own time as much as possible!
Travelling during pregnancy

Are there limitations to travelling while pregnant?

Variations in atmospheric pressure and air pockets, while uncomfortable, do not cause harm to the baby.

At the end stage of pregnancy there is a greater probability of labor being induced and there are some limitations to travelling by plane. International airplane companies require a medical certificate from the 28th gestational week to prove that the pregnancy has been normal. Generally pregnant women are allowed to travel by plane till the 36th gestational week. Finnair airline allows travelling short distances till the 38th gestational week.

The dry air, low air pressure, narrow spaces of the airplane and sitting for a long period of time increase the risk of deep vein thrombosis if the trip lasts for longer than 4 hours. Typical symptoms of the deep vein thrombosis during pregnancy are swelling of the left lower limb and calf in addition to pain and sensitivity in the calf or groin.
It is possible to diminish the risk by following these recommendations:

- drinking sufficient amount of liquids (a glass of water every 1-2 hours)
- walking along the corridors every 1-2 hours
- doing leg exercises
- wearing support stockings.

Travelling to Malaria areas during pregnancy should be avoided. If that is not possible then it is extremely important to receive the prophylactic medication.

Before planning to travel it is important to ensure that at the destination there is a possibility of receiving high level of maternity care in case of possible pregnancy complications.

It is justified to receive vaccinations during pregnancy if the risk of exposure to a disease is high, a possible infection is extremely dangerous for the woman or the baby and there is most likely no harm caused from the vaccination itself.
If there is a need for vaccinations, it is recommended to get them after the first trimester.

While traveling with a car, you should always wear a seat belt with the lap belt, which fits snugly over your hips, not the abdomen. And the shoulder belt should be kept across the chest and over the shoulders. The three-point seat belts provide the best protection for the pregnant woman.

The car journeys should not last for longer than 5 or 6 hours and it is recommended that you take regular breaks during the trip.

In the bus or train it is important to hold on tightly while walking as it is easy to lose footing because the center of gravity changes.
Finnish maternity clinic system

How does the Finnish maternity health care system work?

The foundation of the maternity and child health clinic system was established as early as the 1920’s. By 1944, the system had developed to cover most of the country geographically, and was bound by law to guarantee municipal maternity and child health clinics and municipal care personnel.

From the beginning till present day, the maternity care system has been free of charge.

In Finland, support for families consists of three elements: financial support, services and parental leave. Family benefits are aimed at lowering some of the costs resulting from children. Therefore, they emphasize society’s shared responsibility for children and the fundamentals of their well-being.
The most important forms of support for families are child benefit and day-care services. Every expectant mother in Finland is entitled to a maternity allowance and maternity grant when her pregnancy has lasted at least 154 days and she has undergone a health examination before the end of the fourth month of pregnancy.

The maternity grant consists of either a maternity package or a set, tax-free sum of money. You are entitled to choose either one. The maternity package consists of a variety of baby clothes and baby care articles. Most mothers choose the maternity package because it is worth more financially than the sum of money given. You can apply for both the maternity allowance and maternity grant at least two months before your due date.

What examinations are done in maternity clinics in Finland and how often?

In Finland the expectant mothers have 11-15 meetings with a doctor and a nurse during pregnancy. During the first visit, a blood sample is taken to determine your blood group, Rhesus factor and blood hemoglobin concentration and a urine sample is tested for sugar levels, protein and bacteria.
The expectant mother will be weighed, her height measured and her blood pressure checked. Your doctor will perform an internal examination to determine the position of the womb and check that the size of the uterus corresponds to the pregnancy weeks.

Mothers are also offered screening for fetal chromosome and growth defects and additional tests such as ultrasound scans and tests on maternal serum, as well as tests of the amniotic fluid and the placenta.

**Are there any antenatal courses for pregnant women?**

Antenatal care is provided by prenatal clinics to maintain the good health of the expectant woman and the unborn child. It also aims to promote a healthy lifestyle for the whole family and to help the family prepare for the new baby.

Maternity clinics organize antenatal and family classes for expectant mothers and fathers. Most Finnish fathers and mothers participate in these classes.

You will be informed about the time and place of the antenatal courses in your own maternity clinic.
What kind of support do immigrant pregnant women get?

Immigrant mothers are entitled to the same rights and support as native Finnish mothers if they are covered by the Finnish social security, have been continuously covered by health insurance in Finland, another EU or EEA member state or Switzerland for at least 180 days before due date.

The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, called Kela, also pays parenthood allowance on these same terms to students and the unemployed.

You can also get linguistic support such as an interpreter for your maternity clinic meetings free of charge.
Traditional beliefs about pregnancy

In the old days all desires of a pregnant woman were satisfied implicitly, especially if her wishes were regarding food. It was considered a sin to refuse to fulfill her wishes, since it was believed that it was the baby’s soul, which was in need.

Russian women try not to buy baby items before the newborn enters the family house.

According to a popular belief, children are found in a cabbage, under a cabbage leaf.
in Russian and Somali cultures

In Somalia children are viewed as a gift from God. Therefore families with many children are favored.

Somali women believe that porridge increases the production of breast milk. Having tea traditionally made with milk and spices is also believed to help produce more breast milk.

The new mother stays at home for the first 40 days after the birth of a child and her female relatives fully take care of her, the baby and the household.
Useful contacts

- The Social Insurance Institution of Finland www.kela.fi
- The Family Federation of Finland www.vaestoliitto.fi
- Finnish Institute of Occupational Health www.ttl.fi
- Terveyskirjasto www.terveyskirjasto.fi
- Multicultural Women’s Association (Monika-Naiset liitto ry), tel: 09 - 6943 485, or visit http://www.monikanaiset.fi/
- The Finnish Association for Child and Family Guidance, tel: 09 - 272 7470, or visit www.suomenkasper.fi
- The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters tel: 09 - 4542 440, or visit www.ensijaturvakotienliitto.fi
- Ukk Institute http://www.ukkinstituutti.fi/en/
- Physical activity during and after pregnancy. Available in 14 languages www.ukkinstituutti.fi/ammattilaisille/tyokaluja_liikuntaneuvontaan/tulosta_muut_kielet
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Child and Family Policy in Finland. 2013. Ministry of Social affairs and health


From the authors

We hope that you found the content of the booklet helpful.

Best wishes, Thank you!