

First Trimester

During the first trimester of pregnancy, you are just learning you are pregnant and coming to terms both with your fears and with your hopes for the future. This may have been a surprise and you or your partner may have some ambivalent feelings about the pregnancy. You may also begin to have fantasies and dreams about your child. You may feel increasingly focused on yourself and on the changes that are happening in your body. For many couples, sexual activity is reduced. Most women will experience some of these physical changes during the first trimester.

- missed menstrual periods
- breast changes
- nausea and vomiting
- urinary frequency
- fatigue
- increased basal temperature
- weight gain

The uterus will be just above the pubic bone at 12 weeks

Learn more about how the discomforts of pregnancy like nausea and vomiting can be treated.

During this period, the embryo, which began as a tiny cluster of cells, becomes a fetus and develops all of the major organ systems. Here is what is happening:

First month (1-4 weeks)

- embryo implants (attaches) to the wall of the uterus and develops rapidly
- heartbeat begins on the 25th day
- arm buds appear on the 26th day
- leg buds appear on the 28th day
- primitive digestive system develops

The embryo is 1/5th of an inch long.

Second month (5-8 weeks)

- the face is forming
- ears covered by thin membrane and continue developing
- beginning of the spine
- brain, liver, kidneys, bloodstream, and digestive system are developing
- arms and legs developed

By the end of the second month, the embryo has become a fetus. It is about 1 and 1/8th inches long and weighs 1/30th of an ounce

Third month (9-12 weeks)

- the fetus' eyelids are fused
- facial features are present, the nose and outer ears are formed
- nail beds established
- movement such as head turning or sucking begins
- teeth buds forming
- all internal organs formed
- swallows amniotic fluid

The fetus is about three inches long and weighs one ounce. The placenta is fully developed and also weighs about an ounce. One to three ounces of amniotic fluid are present. By two months a rudimentary umbilical cord has begun to circulate blood and nourishment to the fetus.

Second Trimester

During the second trimester, your pregnancy becomes more obvious to others. You will become more aware of the changes happening to your body, particularly when these changes make you feel more dependent on others. Support and encouragement from your partner and others will become more important. The changes in your sexual activity often stabilise although they are unlikely to return to pre-pregnancy levels until after childbirth is complete.

During these months you will first feel the movements of the fetus and you will become more focused on its development. You may begin to have vivid dreams about your child.

Physically expect the following changes during the second trimester:

- the uterus grows to your navel between 20-22 weeks
- you will have colostrum (pre-milk) in your breasts
- your nipples may begin to get darker and the areolas will get larger
- you may experience changes in the foods your body can digest
- pressure on the blood vessels in the lower part of your body increases and may result in discomforts like haemorrhoids or varicose veins
- skin changes may occur particularly on the face

Dark splotches may appear on the forehead and cheeks particularly among women of colour. The medical name for this is chloasma. It will fade after the birth, but may not disappear completely.

During this period, the fetus continues to grow and begins to respond to its environment. Here is what is happening:

Fourth month (13-16 weeks)

- strong heart beat begins
- lanugo or fine body hair develops

At the end of the fourth month, the fetus is about 6 inches long and weighs four ounces.

Fifth month (17-20 weeks)

- heartbeat can be heard with a stethoscope
- finger and toe nails formed
- sucks thumb
- responds to noise
- grows hair and eyebrows
- movements become increasingly vigorous

At the end of the fourth month, the fetus is about ten to twelve inches long (half its length at birth) and weighs eight ounces to one pound.

Sixth month (21-24 weeks)

- eyes are open
- a creamy substance called vernix covers the skin
- skin is wrinkled and the fetus appears very thin

At the end of the sixth month, the fetus is about 11-14 inches long and weighs 1 1/2 pounds. The placenta and umbilical cord are now fully developed and continue to increase in size. Eight gallons of blood a day flows through the placenta by the fourth month. More than a pint of amniotic fluid is usually present by the sixth month.

Third Trimester

By the third trimester both you and your partner are anticipating the birth of your child. You may be becoming impatient with your body and feeling vulnerable and dependent on others. During the last part of the third trimester, many women experience a burst of energy and become engaged in setting up and preparing their home for a child. Both you and your partner may be feeling some anxiety about the coming birth and feel pressured that the time is getting short before the arrival of the baby. You may continue to have vivid dreams about your child especially during your first pregnancy.

Physically, the third trimester is more uncomfortable. You may experience some of the following:

- backache
- leg cramps
- heartburn
- a dark line called linea nigra may appear running down from the naval
- shortness of breath
- the need to urinate frequently
- the loss of bladder control when you sneeze or cough
- Braxton-Hicks contractions (painless contractions of the uterus)

Also check the following list for signs which should prompt you to call your doctor or midwife.

At 38 weeks, the uterus will have reached the breastbone and you may begin to experience early signs of labour.

During this period, the most dramatic change in the fetus is its continued growth. By the seventh month it weighs about two and a half pounds and is approximately 15 inches in length. By the eighth month the fetus weighs about 5 pounds and is 16 to 18 inches long. During the last month of pregnancy the fetus weighs seven or eight pounds and may be more than 20 inches long. In addition:

- skin wrinkles become less pronounced as body fat accumulates and begins to smooth out the body
- eyes open and close
- fetus responds to light
- lanugo disappears
- fetus stores iron and builds skeleton

The head (or whatever part will be born first) settles into the pelvic canal between 37 and 40 weeks. This is called engagement or lightening. You will likely notice that the fetus' position has changed and you may feel increased pressure on your bladder