

FIRST MONTH OF PREGNANCY



You have just found out that you are pregnant! Congratulations! You have been planning this then I'm sure you and your partner are elated and excited, all ready to embark on this journey. There are usually plenty of questions at this stage such as what are the things you can or cannot do or what are the foods you should avoid and the list goes on.



By Dr Choo Wan Ling

Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, SOG
- Choo Wan Ling Clinic for Women

Diet in pregnancy should not vary much from before pregnancy, such as a sensible diet that is low in fats and sugar. There are certain foods that should be avoided or taken in limited quantities throughout your pregnancy and that includes:

- Raw or half cooked foods (sashimi, half boiled eggs). Make sure food is cooked thoroughly to ensure

that pathogens are killed.

- Soft unripened cheese
- Intake of caffeinated drinks. Limit coffee to a maximum of 2 cups a day or 3 cups of tea
- Reduce intake of liver products due to the high level of retinol content that may affect the fetus.
- Reduce intake of deep sea fish like tuna, deep Atlantic cod fish, swordfish as these contain a high level of mercury.

Vitamin A (tretinoin) and mercury have been associated with fetal deformities.

CHANGES IN MOTHER'S BODY AND HEALTH

You tend to feel very tired easily. Listen to your body and rest

whenever you have the chance. During the 1st month of pregnancy, most women tend to have a poorer appetite. If you are experiencing 'morning sickness' during the first few months of pregnancy, your appetite can be affected. Morning sickness usually last the whole day and evenings are usually the worst. Epigastric discomfort is very common too. Try to take small but regular meals - that would help alleviate some of those symptoms.

Urinary frequency is also a common complaint, especially at night when it disturbs your sleep. This is due to the expanding womb pressing on the bladder. Continue to stay hydrated, but reduce

water intake after dinner.

FETAL DEVELOPMENT

During the first month, the blastocyst (a ball of cells) reaches the womb and implants itself into the uterine lining. Some women may experience slight spotting at this stage, which is termed as implantation bleeding. After a week, the cells start to differentiate into the different organs and the external features are starting to form (embryonic stage). This is a crucial stage as the fetus is very susceptible to damage from the consumption of unsuitable medications, illegal drug use, smoking and getting infections like rubella.

The fetus' limb buds, which look like paddles,

are beginning to form. The jaw bones and the fetus' heart start to form. Even the neural tube which will eventually become the baby's brain and spine, has started to develop. In the later part of the month, the umbilical cord will be formed, leading to the placenta. The size of the baby is about 1.5cm at this stage.

COMMON QUESTION THAT MOTHERS HAVE

Can I exercise when I am pregnant?

Yes. Exercise is safe in pregnancy. However, as most women tend to feel very tired and possibly 'sick' in the first trimester, it can be tough to stick to an exercise regime. Start slowly and consistently. Rest if unwell.

Mum's Sharing

By Jenny Tai

Congratulations! This is the beginning of an incredible journey in becoming a mum. In these 9 months, you're going to experience many exciting changes - both emotionally and physically. There might be times when you simply feel overwhelmed, tired, worried and stressed, but there were be countless of moments when you're full of joy and energy too.

It may be hard to believe right now that you're really

pregnant (after all, your belly isn't showing yet), but as your baby grows and your body changes more each month, this reality will be easier to wrap your mind around. In the meantime, embrace the start of this miraculous journey.

To be able to provide the best for your growing baby, you must take care of your own health first. During this period, trust your instincts, lean on your husband for support, and learn as much as possible. Not forgetting to be good to yourself.

YOU ARE FEELING:

Excited and emotional. There is a new life growing inside you, which means that you are about to embark on a new adventure. Due to elevated hormone levels, your mood fluctuates frequently.

You might also feel vulnerable, cautious, scared or worried as the possibility of a miscarriage is the highest at trimester one. Do not stress or worry too much! Staying at peace and remaining as calm as possible is the best for you and your baby.

3rd Month



Tip of the month:

Some pregnant women are not as enthusiastic about sexual activity. Do it if you feel for it. If you have any concerns, check with your health provider and do not forget to let your husband know how you feel.

THIRD MONTH OF PREGNANCY

The last month of the first trimester may be a particularly trying month as hormone levels peak during the 9-10th week, meaning more severe morning sickness. Do not worry about not eating enough for the pregnancy. If you start off at a healthy weight, you do not need extra calories during the first trimester.



By Dr Cindy Pang

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Avoid food that may contain harmful bacteria, such as soft cheeses (from unpasteurized milk), pâté and raw or undercooked

meat and poultry. Some fishes contain methylmercury, harmful in high doses to the growing fetal brain. Limit your consumption of fish to the equivalent of about two servings per week.

Between 11-12 weeks, your doctor will usually recommend that you consider first trimester testing for fetal anomalies, in particular Down syndrome.

This battery of tests includes ultrasound measurement of the fetal neck skin thickness and maternal blood tests for hCG hormone and pregnancy-associated plasma protein A (PAPP-A) levels. Together, they provide an estimate level for Down syndrome risk.

CHANGES IN MOTHER'S BODY AND HEALTH

Increased blood volume

due to pregnancy may cause increased urination, as well as more stuffy noses, nose bleeds and bleeding gums. Constipation issue may arise and it is common because of hormonal changes cause by muscular fibres trying to relax. Increase your intake of fruits and vegetables. Do not forget to take in more water too! Consult your doctor in extreme cases.

FETAL DEVELOPMENT

By the end of the third month, your baby measures about 10 cm long and weighs around 28g. Lots of changes are happening during this month. Features such as the external ear are already formed. Fingernails and toenails, tiny muscles and baby teeth under the gums are all developing rapidly. Some of the baby's organs are already functioning, such as the

kidneys and liver. The rest of the body parts such as the digestive system, bone marrow, reproductive organs and the pituitary gland, will mature slowly.

COMMON QUESTION THAT MOTHERS HAVE

How do I stop morning sickness?

Ginger tea may help to reduce your symptoms, small healthy snacks between meals will help too.

Mum's Sharing

By Jenny Tai

You're now at the tail end of the first trimester! Congratulations on reaching this first milestone. By now you may have gained more weight. Your belly is also starting to protrude a little to accommodate your growing baby. Don't fret about your expanding waistline. Instead, celebrate the beauty of your pregnant body.

YOU ARE FEELING:

Although you're still riding the emotional roller coaster, you're probably less anxious and fearful of miscarriage now as you reach the end of the first trimester. Some women wait until they past their first trimester before announcing their pregnancy. If this is the case for you, you are probably excited about breaking this happy news. Finally, there is no need to make excuses for skipping out on drinks with your

girlfriends! Thankfully, nausea and vomiting are starting to wane.

REMEDIES FOR COMMON PREGNANCY DISCOMFORTS:

You might be more forgetful than usual, thanks to all these pregnancy hormones. Don't be too frustrated. Blame it on the "pregnancy fog" and do your best to jot down notes and refer

to your schedule when needed. Smartphones and refrigerator are probably the best place to remind you of important dates and information. You can also ask your husband to remind you on important occasions.

As your digestive system slows down, you may experience some constipation. Eat more fiber, drink plenty of water, and do some light exercise to get your bowels moving.

YOUR PREGNANCY TO-DO LIST:

1. Plan how to announce the news of your pregnancy.
2. Continue to get as much sleep as possible. Let undone tasks slide and just hit the sack if you're tired.
3. If you want to travel, the second trimester is probably the easiest and the best time to do so. That means you can start booking your tickets now!
4. Talk to your doctor about a weight goal for your pregnancy.

FIFTH MONTH OF PREGNANCY



By Dr Choo Wan Ling

Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, SOG
– Choo Wan Ling Clinic for Women

If you are a first-time mum, you should still be feeling great at this stage. You may start to feel the fetal moving in your womb at this stage. The movements are still very light at this point and may feel like fluttering touch only. There are days when you may not feel any movement at all as the baby is still quite small. Try to exercise regularly if you can. It will help you maintain your fitness level, which is important during delivery.

CHANGES TO MOTHER'S BODY AND HEALTH

You are starting to look more prominent with the pregnancy bump. Stretch marks may start to form so keep your skin moisturized. Due to the expanding bump and the additional weight on your body, you may start to get swollen legs and varicose veins. Be extra cautious when you are out, your

ligaments might weaken due to hormonal changes. Thus, it is common to sustain 'sprains' especially in the bum area (sacro-iliac joint).

FETAL DEVELOPMENT

During the fifth month, the baby should weigh

around 300-600g and approximate 20cm long from crown to rump. Baby's eyelids and eyebrows are fully formed at this stage. Through their eyelids are still fused, the eyeballs are fully developed. Baby's organs are almost fully

formed at this stage. Be amazed that their air sacs in the lungs are fully developed now, but they are still not mature to function outside the womb. The baby is starting to accumulate fat and beginning to look more 'chubby'.

COMMON QUESTIONS THAT MOTHERS HAVE

Can I still travel at this stage?

Yes, at this point airlines do allow pregnant women to fly. You should still feel fairly mobile at this stage to enjoy travelling.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

"LET US MAKE PREGNANCY AN OCCASION WHEN WE APPRECIATE OUR FEMALE BODIES." -MERETE LEONHARDT-LUPA

Mum's Sharing

By Jenny Tai

This month is all about prioritizing sleep to accommodate the growing set of aches and pains you're experiencing - including persisting back pain. The good thing is, you will still feel relatively energetic. The downside is, your muscles and ligaments are really stretching to support the weight of your growing baby. But here's an exciting bonus for you, you

will get to find out the gender of your baby during the fifth month of pregnancy!

YOU ARE FEELING:

More on edge. Sleep deprivation may contribute to brain fog and a short temper. Set aside a specific time and place in your home where you can de-stress and connect with your baby. Place your hand on your belly and imagine the little miracle that you're growing. Think of

kind and gentle thoughts about yourself and your body and you will forget about the aches and pains for a while.

REMEDIES FOR COMMON PREGNANCY DISCOMFORTS:

The skin on your belly is stretching, getting tighter and tremendously itchy. Rub some baby oil, coconut oil, or your favourite moisturizing cream to relieve the itching.

Any discomfort in your lower abdomen and hips can be relieved by doing three to five pelvic tilts, follow these steps:

- 1 Get on your hands and knees.
- 2 Breathe in, then tighten your abdomen and buttocks. Your back will naturally arch up. Hold for three seconds.
- 3 Breathe out and relax. Your back should be straight.
- 4 Repeat.

YOUR PREGNANCY TO-DO LIST

1. Start a list of baby names. Whether or not you chose to find out your baby's gender, you and your husband can jot down some favourite names to choose from.
2. Think about your preferred method of labor and delivery. Do you prefer to deliver naturally without any pain medication, or are you planning to get an epidural? What would you say are the pros and cons of each?



EPIDURAL PAIN RELIEF FOR LABOUR

Epidural is a form of anesthetic that is administered to the back of the woman during childbirth. Does an epidural provide very good pain relief during child birth? Dr Choo Wan Ling tells you more about epidural and how it works.

How does an epidural work?

An epidural is a regional analgesia. That means that it decreases (rather than block completely) pain sensation in a particular region of the body and in this case it's the lower part of our body. It blocks out the nerve impulses from the lower part of the body with anesthetic medication that is instilled in the epidural space.

What is the procedure like?

An epidural feels like a normal injection except that it is done along the spine. It is usually performed by an anaesthetist. You will be asked to lie on your side or seated upright. With your back arched outwards (with body curled up) to 'open' up the spaces between the spinal bones. The first injection will be administered to numb the area before the epidural needle is inserted. You will feel some pressure as the anaesthetist is inserting the epidural needle into the space. Subsequently, a fine plastic tubing will be threaded through the epidural needle and the needle will then be removed. The anaesthetic medication will be pumped through that plastic tubing continuously to provide the pain relief throughout the labour process. At the end of the delivery process, the plastic catheter will be removed.

Can anyone have an epidural during delivery?

Most women can have an epidural during delivery. There are certain contraindications to epidural and these are:

- ▶ The fetus is significant distress
- ▶ Abruption placentae (separation of placenta before delivery of baby)
- ▶ Infection at site of injection
- ▶ Bleeding disorders
- ▶ Back/neurological conditions (this is dependent on case to case basis)

What are the pros and cons of using an epidural for pain relief during labour?

Administering the epidural during labour is to help alleviate the pain. In comparison to the other forms of pain relief in labour like Entonox (gaseous mixture of nitrous oxide and oxygen) or Intramuscular Pethidine, the procedure of having an epidural is more invasive as it requires an injection into the epidural space in the spine. However, the epidural provides very effective pain relief compared to Entonox and Intramuscular Pethidine.

Having sufficient pain relief allows you to relax and rest during labour, conserving your energy for the pushing later. Many a times, we do see that with relaxation, the cervix does actually dilate faster. Hence it is not true that having an epidural would slow down labour progression. The fear that some women have is that they would be unable to push the baby out because they can't feel the contractions. As the epidural dose can be adjusted, when fully dilated, it is possible to lower the dose of epidural so that some sensation can be felt to help with the pushing.

As an epidural reduces the sensation in the lower body, once the

epidural is in, you would have to be restricted to your bed and not be able to walk around. If you would prefer to be mobile during labour, it is best that you delay having the epidural until the discomfort gets too much for you to want to walk anyway.

Is there any side effect for using epidural?

Common side effects include uncontrollable shivering, nausea, vomiting.

Sometimes after the initial placement of the epidural, there can be a sudden drop in the mother's blood pressure and that can cause the fetal heart rate to drop. This is usually momentary and once the maternal blood pressure is stabilized with intravenous infusion, the fetal heart rate should revert back to the norm.

As the sensation in the lower body decreased, there may be a need for a urinary catheter as you might not be able to sense if the bladder is full. This sensation would slowly return a few hours after the epidural is removed. Similarly, walking can only resume later after the epidural wears off after the delivery. In instances where some women may have difficulty pushing due to numbness, the need for instrumental delivery eg. Vacuum and forceps delivery is increased during the second stage of labour.

Less than 1% of patients may experience a 'dural' tap. This is when there is a puncture in the dural membrane. When the epidural catheter is removed, the fluid surrounding the spinal cord flows out from the puncture resulting in an intense headache when upright. This usually heals on its own after a few days to a week, otherwise a blood patch can be done to close up the gap. Nerve damage is extremely rare.

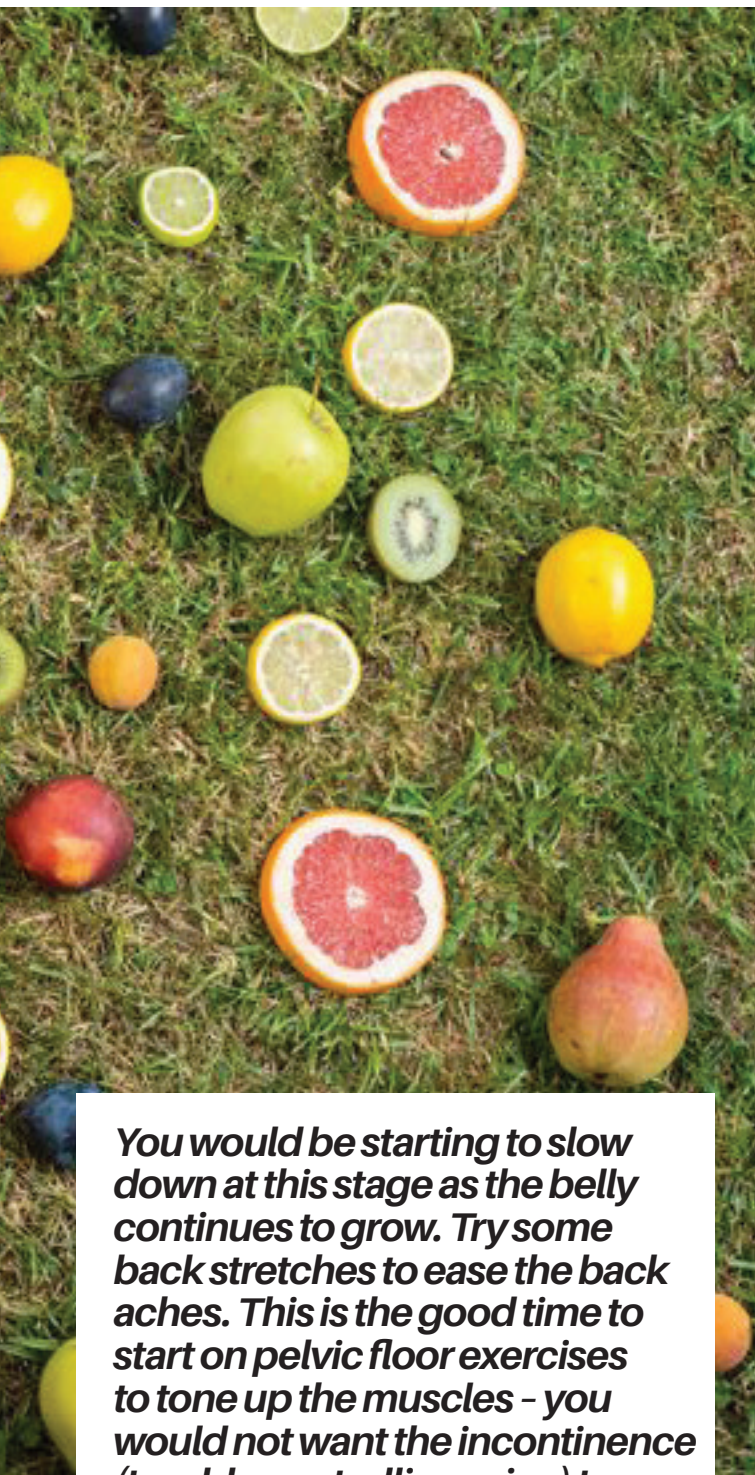
Will the epidural affect the newborn?

There is no concrete evidence to suggest that epidurals can affect a newborn or the fetus.





SIXTH MONTH OF PREGNANCY



You would be starting to slow down at this stage as the belly continues to grow. Try some back stretches to ease the back aches. This is the good time to start on pelvic floor exercises to tone up the muscles - you would not want the incontinence (trouble controlling urine) to continue after birth. Do some feet/leg exercises at bed time to help reduce the leg swelling and cramping. If leg cramps are common at night, you can consider getting compression socks to wear at night.



By Dr Choo Wan Ling
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CHANGES TO MOTHER'S HEALTH AND BODY

The belly is getting bigger and more uncomfortable. Backaches are common as the back arches to balance the bigger tummy. Lower leg swelling is getting more obvious too. As the pelvic bone starts to expand as the baby grows, it puts a strain on the pubic symphysis (right below the belly). Mums may complain of sharp pain when walking, sitting, getting up or turning around in bed. You can consider getting a belly belt to help support that area.

Urinary frequency may be an issue again as the pressure from the womb increases.

Due to the uterus pressing on to the pelvic floor, some women may even experience urinary incontinence when they cough or sneeze.

FETAL DEVELOPMENT

During the sixth month, Baby's lanugo hair is becoming more obvious as it takes on a darker tone. They are still growing at this stage and will start to grow rapidly towards the end of this month. Baby is putting on more fats and they look like a full-grown baby. At this stage, baby's hearing and sight are becoming more distinct. There may even response to loud noises and even light source that is placed on mummy's tummy. Well, don't be surprised if you feel baby's hiccups in the womb too.

COMMON QUESTION THAT MOTHERS HAVE

Should there be any changes to my diet?

There should not be much changes to your current diet. The foods to avoid and restrict are the same as before. You may notice that you have a better appetite and continue to keep to the nutritious foods that you have been consuming. Do continue with the supplement intake so to replenish your nutritional needs.

