

SLEEP AND PREGNANCY

Quick Facts:

Pregnancy affects many aspects of a woman's body, and it may also affect how she sleeps. Hormone changes, physical changes and the stress of pregnancy can all change the duration and quality of sleep. Most of these changes are reversible after delivery. For some women, sleep changes during pregnancy are a sign of underlying sleep disorders that persist after the delivery of the baby.

KEY POINTS:

- **The normal changes that occur during pregnancy can cause sleep disruption.**
- **Risks of developing obstructive sleep apnea and restless legs syndrome increase during pregnancy.**
- **Anxiety and hormones can contribute to insomnia during pregnancy.**
- **97% of women wake during the night in the third trimester.**



How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit www.sleepeducation.org

Am I At Risk?

Most pregnant women will experience some sleep disruption. Some women can develop gestational diabetes during pregnancy. Gestational diabetes causes your blood sugar levels to rise. Women with gestational diabetes also can develop obstructive sleep apnea during pregnancy.

GENERAL OVERVIEW:

Healthy sleep is required for your body and mind to function properly. Poor sleep can cause irritability, depressed mood, fatigue, sleepiness, inattention, and disruptions to your metabolism. A woman's body will undergo many changes during pregnancy, and these changes can affect sleep.

Increased sleepiness tends to occur during the first trimester of pregnancy. Sleep disruptions caused by nausea or vomiting and increased urination also are common.

Many women report an improvement in sleep and daytime alertness during the second trimester. However, some women begin snoring by the end of the second trimester.

New or increased snoring that occurs along with silent breathing pauses or daytime sleepiness is a warning sign for obstructive sleep apnea. This sleep disorder can increase the risk of preeclampsia and gestational diabetes.

The third trimester can be the most difficult trimester to sleep. In one study, 97% of women had at least some difficulty sleeping through the night during this stage of pregnancy. Common causes of sleep disruption include:

- **Increased urination**
- **Heartburn**
- **Nasal congestion**
- **Positional discomfort**
- **Contractions**
- **Back pain**
- **Snoring**
- **Restless legs**

Restless legs syndrome is a sleep disorder that involves an unpleasant sensation in the legs, along with an urge to move the legs while at rest. It affects about 1 in 5 pregnant women, particularly in the third trimester. Restless legs syndrome can be caused by iron deficiency. During pregnancy it increases the risk of the following problems:

- **Preeclampsia**
- **Gestational hypertension**
- **Cesarean delivery**
- **Depressed mood**

TIPS:

- Try to sleep 8 hours each night. Significant sleep deprivation can increase your risk of premature labor.
- Try to wake up and go to bed at the same time each day.
- Try limiting naps to 30 minutes each day. Napping too long can disrupt nighttime sleep.
- If you have uncomfortable leg sensations, ensure that you are taking enough iron.
- Leg massages can be helpful for cramps or restless legs sensations.

➔ Next Steps:

- Talk to your obstetrician or primary care provider about any significant sleep disruptions. Tell your doctor if you begin to snore or have restless legs sensations during pregnancy.



Questions For Your Physician

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.



Sample Questions:

What do I need to be aware of during my
pregnancy regarding sleep?



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Adrian A Santamaria, MD, DABPN, DABSM
455 School street suite # 20
Tomball, TX 77375
Phone: (281) 357-5678 | Fax: (281) 357-8765
nwhneurology.com

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