

# Pregnancy: Counting the Weeks of Pleasure & Pain

Stages of pregnancy can be accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and fear, blended with excitement and nervousness. However, what scares most women the most is the lack of knowledge regarding what is happening to their bodies week by week during pregnancy until the delivery of the baby. This information will help to give some brief guidelines about what happens during pregnancy and how the body changes from week to week. For a more detailed weekly description, download “My Week to Week Pregnancy Guide” under “Services”/ “Obstetrics”/ “Moms to Be” at [www.oliverobgyn.com](http://www.oliverobgyn.com).

## **1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Week**

This is the period of pregnancy where the fertilized egg is known as a zygote and is just a ball of cells. Most people experience little to no signs or symptoms of pregnancy at this stage. Nipple tenderness, fatigue and nausea may be the first sign of pregnancy.

## **5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Week**

With the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> week many women start exhibiting early symptoms of pregnancy. Nausea may start at this early stage or may not occur for another few weeks. Smells may be very intense. Severe fatigue is common. The beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> week is usually when a heartbeat can be seen on ultrasound. By the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> week, the fetus, as it is called now, starts looking more like a human being with rudimentary limbs seen on ultrasound.

## **9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Week**

This is the time when a woman may start to feel bloated and the waistline starts to vanish as clothes become snugger. The developing fetus is growing, causing the uterus to expand from the pelvis into the abdomen. By the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> week, nausea and vomiting, if present, may be resolving. The appetite may start pick back up and the severe nausea experienced during the first trimester may be resolving by the end of this period.

## **13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> Week**

You are entering the “honeymoon” period of the pregnancy where you start to feel like your old self again. During this time, Dr. Oliver will perform an ultrasound where she will look at the fluid between the skin of the neck and the neck muscle. This is called the nuchal translucency. You will also have blood work with a screening test for Down’s Syndrome done at this time in the pregnancy. This period may be the time when people start to notice that you are pregnant without you having to tell them. This may also be the time when you start telling the people who you are not close to ( your job and acquaintances), as you are officially out of the first trimester of pregnancy and the risk of miscarriage is significantly lower. Pain called “round ligament pain” may start as the uterus stretches. This may feel like a sudden sharp pain on one or both sides of the groin that can very unexpected and intense. Tylenol may or may not be helpful.

## **17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Week**

Still in the honeymoon period, but starting to get more uncomfortable, the uterus is at your belly button by 20 weeks. You may start to experience back pain. This is the time when you first know that there is truly another living person inside of you. You start to feel baby’s first movements. Of course, the baby has been moving all along and a lot! You have probably witnessed this movement at your last ultrasound. However, you haven’t been able to feel him/her up until now. You may still will not feel all the baby’s many movements, just the big ones. There may be times (hours or days early on) where you don’t feel the baby move at all but, rest assured the baby is kicking up a storm in there. Around week 20 is when you will be sent for your Level II anatomy scan where the baby’s organs will be looked at closely by an expert. Dr. Oliver prefers Johns Hopkins Maternal Fetal Medicine (MFM) department because they are the best of the best! The MFM visit should only comprise one visit unless the maternal-fetal-medicine specialists were unable to see all the anatomy or there is some abnormality noted. A lot of patients worry excessively about this visit. Remember, because ultrasound now has the ability to see things that were never noticed years ago, abnormalities that are insignificant can be detected and misinterpreted. We are now able to detect findings on ultrasound that have no real clinical relevance to your baby’s overall health and wellness. Most times, these findings only cause worry to the mom-to-be and has no long term effect on your baby’s health. Try to take it all in stride! A lot of women are unable to enjoy this unique and beautiful time in their lives because they are constantly worried about everything. Enjoy and embrace the pregnancy and your body’s ever

changing topography. In addition, usually people are nicer to you when you are pregnant and you have the unique ability of carrying this wonderful little being around with you everywhere you go without the bulkiness of a car seat yet!

### **21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> Week**

You are starting to become more uncomfortable and may start to feel some occasional Braxton-Hicks contractions as the uterus contracts in response to baby's movements, dehydration, your movements, intercourse and urination. These mild contractions are not thought to have a roll in dilating the cervix this early but, may have some impact on softening of the cervix. Some women feel them as early as 16 weeks and some women don't feel them at all. Remember, your uterus is a muscle and anything can irritate it. If the contractions become uncomfortable rest for a bit, take a nice warm bath and drink plenty of water. These tips should help to slow down the very tense and tight cramps your experiencing now. At this time in the pregnancy, the baby is laying down fat deposits in the face and body and on ultrasound is starting to look less like an alien or skeleton and more like a little human being.

### **25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> Week**

During the 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> week, the baby is very active, moving around vigorously and responds to sounds and touch. Loud noises may make the baby kick. During this period the baby's eyelids will start to open and he/she will start blinking. Your back pain may start to increase and a maternity belt may be a good investment at this point. Between the 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy you will drink the sweet drink to test for diabetes in the pregnancy ( a glucola test). By week 24, the baby is able to survive outside of the womb ( which we hope it won't be at this point) but usually with significant morbidity (problems).

### **29<sup>th</sup> to 32<sup>nd</sup> Week**

As your bump pushes up against your lungs and you have extra weight to carry around, you may feel breathless. Your indigestion may also be getting worse. Be sure to prop yourself up on pillows at night when you sleep and try to stay away from greasy or spicy foods. Don't lie down less than 2-3 hours after a big meal. The baby continues to be very active and make plenty of moves. But by the end of this period the baby may slow down a bit and start to position itself with its head pointing downwards, in preparation for birth. This positioning is referred to as cephalic presentation. If the baby is not lying in this position yet, there is no need for concern, he/she still has plenty of time to turn.

### **33<sup>rd</sup> to 36<sup>th</sup> Week**

You're starting to feel tired again like you were in those first few weeks of pregnancy. You've definitely slowed down and you may start to develop ankle and feet swelling. The Braxton-Hicks contractions are more frequent and intense. These normal discomforts of pregnancy don't seem so normal, but they are! The baby's brain and nervous system are full developed, the bones are starting to harden and your baby is curled up in a ball on ultrasound with the legs bent up against its chest and its feet against its face. Between 35 and 37 weeks you will have the last official test of the pregnancy known as a Group B strep test which tests for a bacterium present in the vagina and/or the rectum/ This bacterium is present in about 30% of women. The bacterium usually doesn't cause problems during pregnancy but has a slight risk of infection during labor. If your test does show this bacterium, you will be treated with antibiotics while in labor and not before unless it is found in your urine.

### **37<sup>th</sup> to 40<sup>th</sup> Week**

You're at the home stretch. 37 weeks is considered a term pregnancy. Although many women may ask to be delivered at this time (because they are over it already!), Dr. Oliver technically cannot induce you before 39 weeks of pregnancy (and your due date needs to have been documented well and early) due to fetal lung maturity issues related to early delivery. In addition, particularly for first-time moms, the cervix is usually not soft and ripe enough at 37 weeks, thereby increasing the risk for cesarean section. You're feeling increased pressure in your lower abdomen. The swelling, back pain and shortness of breath are usually at its peak at this time. Hold on, it's almost over! The baby's gut now contains meconium – the sticky, green substance that will form your baby's first poo after birth. Your baby is ready to be born, and you'll finally be meeting him/her sometime in the next couple of weeks! Congratulations, you have made it through this very pleasurable and painful but ultimately most exciting time of your life!