

When to Seek Medical Care



Whether you are pregnant, in labor, or recently gave birth, don't wait to seek care if you experience any of the following. Some of these things can be normal, but some can indicate something serious. This list does not include every possible emergency. So, if something feels seriously wrong or different from your normal, seek medical attention and tell the healthcare team that you are pregnant or have been pregnant within the last year.

Sis, Don't Let Them Turn You Away!

- **Severe or persistent nausea and vomiting.** Some nausea and vomiting is expected during pregnancy. However severe nausea and vomiting is concerning, especially when you cannot keep fluids down, are becoming dehydrated, feel faint or extremely weak, or are unable to eat or drink at all.
- **Vaginal bleeding during pregnancy.** Bleeding during pregnancy deserves a call to your provider. It may not be anything serious, but could be something that requires immediate attention.
- **Vaginal discharge or Fluid leaking from the vagina** before labor such as a sudden gush or continuous leaking of fluid or increased discharge.
- **Severe or worsening abdominal, pelvic, or upper abdominal pain**, particularly sudden or persistent pain, severe pain under the ribs / in the upper-right belly area, or pain accompanied by bleeding, headache, vomiting, or feeling faint.
- **Regular contractions, pelvic pressure, cramping, or low back pain** especially when they are lasting longer, becoming stronger, closer together, or accompanied by fluid leakage or bleeding.
- **Severe headache** that won't go away or is getting worse, especially a sudden headache that does not improve with recommended treatment, or a headache accompanied by dizziness, vision changes, swelling, or high blood pressure.
- **Changes in vision.** Blurred vision, seeing spots or flashing lights, double vision, temporary loss of vision, or other sudden changes should be immediately reported and evaluated.
- **Blood pressure of 140/90 mmHg or higher.** Even if your baseline is normally higher than the typical 120/80 mmHg, a reading 140/90 mmHg or higher should be reported to your provider. Don't assume that the reading is just a fluke. Don't wait for it to get worse before reporting it.
- **Chest pain, pressure, or tightness**, especially with shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, dizziness, or a fast or irregular heartbeat.
- **Trouble breathing or sudden shortness of breath**, especially if it occurs while you are at rest, comes on suddenly, or is accompanied by chest pain, fainting, or a racing heart.

- **Exhaustion.** Pregnancy can make you tired. You are literally building and growing a new human. But if you are suddenly very tired and weak, and don't have enough energy to go about your day, you should report this. If you are tired when you get up in the morning or too tired to care for your baby, call your provider. They can do many tests including bloodwork.
- **Fainting, loss of consciousness, severe dizziness, confusion, or new weakness.** This may or may not be accompanied by headache, vision changes, bleeding, chest pain, shortness of breath, or a fast heartbeat.
- **Seizures** during pregnancy or after birth require immediate medical attention. If you have uncontrolled epilepsy, you should be seen.
- **Significant decrease in movement.** Once you regularly feel your baby move, a noticeable change should be evaluated promptly rather than waiting for your next appointment.
- **Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher** with feeling very ill, this may or may not be accompanied by chills, severe abdominal pain, foul-smelling vaginal discharge, breast redness and pain, urinary symptoms, or worsening wound/incision pain.
- **Severe swelling of the face or hands**, particularly with headache or vision changes.
- **Swelling, redness, warmth, or significant pain in one leg**, particularly if it occurs suddenly or is accompanied by chest pain or difficulty breathing. Do not rub it.
- **Heavy bleeding after birth.** Some bleeding is expected after delivery and is called lochia. It normally begins as red and gradually becomes lighter over the following weeks. Heavy, rapidly increasing, gushing bleeding, large clots, or bleeding accompanied by dizziness, weakness, fainting, pale/clammy skin, or a racing heart is not normal and requires urgent evaluation.
- **Severe or worsening postpartum abdominal pain / uterine tenderness**, particularly when accompanied by fever, chills, heavy bleeding, foul-smelling discharge.
- **Foul-smelling postpartum vaginal discharge.** Postpartum blood (lochia) has a normal blood/menstrual-like odor, but a distinctly foul or offensive odor, particularly with fever, chills, or uterine tenderness / abdominal pain, can indicate infection.
- **Severe perineal pain (external vaginal pain)** or rapidly increasing swelling after vaginal birth, especially pain that is getting worse rather than better, significant swelling, a feeling of pressure, heavy bleeding, or increasingly painful repair.
- **Cesarean incision.** If the incision is red, hot, swollen, painful, opens, is bleeding or draining pus or foul smelling fluids, opens or separates, get seen immediately.
- **Sudden or severe pain after cesarean birth.** Severe abdominal pain that is worsening rather than improving or pain that occurs with fever, heavy bleeding, shortness of breath, fainting, or other concerning symptoms.
- **Severe breast pain** with redness, swelling, fever, chills, or flu-like symptoms. Breastfeeding can involve fullness, tenderness, and engorgement, but significant systemic illness or rapidly worsening symptoms require prompt evaluation for infection or other complications, particularly if accompanied by fever, spreading redness, significant swelling, sharp, shooting pain, or drainage.
- **Skin.** Extreme itching particularly on hands and feet without any rash. Yellowing skin.

- **Excretory issues.** Difficulty urinating, pain/burning with urination, dark urine, pale stools. This may or may not be accompanied by fever, back pain, chills, or feeling sick.
- **Severe headache after an epidural or spinal procedure**, especially a headache that becomes significantly worse when sitting or standing and improves when lying down. Contact your maternity care team promptly. Severe symptoms or neurological changes warrant urgent evaluation.
- **Sudden severe swelling or rapid weight gain** after birth accompanied by headache, vision changes, shortness of breath, or upper abdominal pain
- **Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby.** This does not mean you are a bad parent. But, it should not be taken lightly. You do not have to act on the thought for it to require immediate attention. Tell someone you trust and seek emergency help. Connect to a perinatal mental health professional.
- **Feeling disconnected from reality**, experiencing hallucinations, severe confusion, paranoia, or extreme agitation. These can be signs of a perinatal psychosis, which is a psychiatric emergency requiring immediate treatment.
- **A severe allergic reaction** after a medication, injection, food, or other exposure such as swelling of the lips, tongue, face, or throat, difficulty breathing, wheezing, widespread hives, fainting, or rapidly worsening symptoms require emergency treatment.
- **Anything that makes you think, "Something is seriously wrong."** You know your baseline. You know your normal. You know your body. You do not need to identify the diagnosis before asking for help. When you go, you can simply say, "I know my body, and something isn't right. I need to be evaluated." CDC and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) specifically encourage patients to seek care when something feels unusual or concerning, even when the symptom does not fit neatly into a checklist.

♥ *Sis, Remember. You don't have to prove that something is wrong before you seek care. Your job (along with your village) is to notice any concerning changes and to communicate them. Your healthcare team's job is to evaluate you, determine what may be happening, and explain what comes next.*



"If you feel like something isn't right, or you aren't sure if it's serious, talk to your health care provider. Be sure to tell them if you are pregnant or were pregnant within the last year." - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention