

Nutrition and Dietetics

Hyperemesis Gravidarum

This information gives advice to help people with Hyperemesis Gravidarum. It explains what treatments you will be offered, and when to ask for more support from healthcare professionals. It is important to get help early on to look after mother and baby. The booklet also has advice for finding out how to eat well in pregnancy once you are feeling better.

You can be referred to a Dietitian (a specialist in nutrition) by professionals caring for you in hospital, or when you are back at home; your midwife or GP might refer you.

What is Hyperemesis Gravidarum (HG)?

A lot of people have sickness in pregnancy. About 8 out of 10 pregnant people feel sick (nausea), are sick (vomit), or both during pregnancy. For most people, this gets better or stops completely by around weeks 16 to 20, but for some it can last longer.

Although it can last longer, HG usually happens in the first trimester of pregnancy (weeks 1-13). It is diagnosed when all other reasons for feeling ill have been ruled out and:

- The person is sick a lot (usually more than 3 times per day)
- Has weight loss of 5% (below pre-pregnancy weight),
- and there are chemicals called ketones found in the persons urine test.

HG can lead to not being able to drink enough (being dehydrated), weight loss, changes in the blood (electrolyte disturbances) and to not being able to eat enough (malnutrition) if it isn't treated.



Patient Information

Treatments for HG are aimed at helping stop you feeling and being sick and should help you to eat and drink well again. If the treatments can't be given at home a person may need to go to hospital.

Treatment of HG

Anti-sickness medication (anti emetics)

You may have been prescribed oral anti-sickness medications by your GP. Sometimes this is a short trial. **Anti-sickness medications can help you eat and drink enough.** If you stop taking the medication and you feel unwell contact your GP.

There are different forms of anti-sickness medications. If your still feel unwell work with your GP to find which works best for you.

If you have tablets to stop you feeling sick (anti-emetics), take these before every meal, unless your nurse or GP tells you to have them at another time.

Vitamin supplementation

Your GP may prescribe multi vitamins and minerals. Sometimes this is because the body needs to get used to food and drink again when you haven't been eating well for a while. When you are sick you use up your body's stores of some vitamins and minerals. It is important that you take these as prescribed.

What happens in hospital?

You may need to go to hospital if you are still feeling sick and are being sick and if you aren't eating and drinking well even though you have medication.

Treatments

In hospital you may need fluids to put into your blood (that is intravenous or IV, sometimes called a drip). You might also need anti-sickness medications in this way and vitamin and minerals. Doctors are likely to test your blood to find out what you need. Doctors would be looking to see if you are clinically dehydrated (not having enough liquid in your body).

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“Build Up” Drinks

When you are unable to eat well you might be given prescribed drinks, these are called oral nutritional supplements. There are some available in hospital and different types for home. Before you leave hospital, you should be given sample packs of drinks to try when you are home. One week supply of build-up drinks (oral nutritional supplements) from hospital should also be given for you to take home.

If you need them at home, a two-week rolling prescription will be arranged through your GP until you are able to eat enough, and your weight goes back up.

Going home

People with HG can feel better quickly when they have these treatments. This is because they are resting and have enough fluids. Being dehydrated makes feeling sick and tired worse. If symptoms start again at home, contact your GP or midwife right away.

Ask for more help from your hospital doctor, GP, or Community Midwife:

- If you have lost weight even though you take the oral nutritional supplements
- If you can't take the drinks

What if I can't eat and drink?

A few patients will need artificial nutrition (this is feeding with a tube) if they can't eat or drink enough when they have had treatment.

When you are feeling better

When HG is treated, and you feel better, it is important to follow a healthy and balanced diet all through your pregnancy. This will give you all the vitamins and minerals your body needs for you and your growing baby.

- Use the tips below to help you feel better.
- Check your weight, keep a note of this with a date to help show if you need more help.

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1) Stay away from things that make you feel sick as much as you can.

Stay away from:	Try – they can help with sickness:
Strong smelling foods	Cold foods
Milk and yoghurt when you feel sick	Dry and plain foods like dry toast, plain biscuits, bread, rice, crackers and pasta, cereal, potato
High fat foods, like fried foods, gravies, thick sauces, spiced or seasoned foods	A small bedtime snack. This helps you feel less sick when you wake up
Creamy/chocolate desserts	Feel sick when you wake up? Eat 2 to 3 crackers or a slice of dry toast before getting up

2) Have small meals or snacks more often. Try to eat a small meal or snack every 2-3 hours instead of large meals. If you don't eat it can make you feel sicker.

3) Where you eat can make a difference. Try to eat somewhere relaxed and calm. Try and have space and air around you, eat slowly and chew well.

4) Tips to help with drinks:

- Use a bottle of water, sip very slowly through a straw every 15-20 minutes.
- Try sucking ice cubes made of fruit juice or squash.
- Freeze half a bottle of mineral water and then top up with fridge cold water; this keeps the water freezing cold for hours.
- Cold drinks may help you feel better.
- Bottled mineral water may taste better than tap water.
- Don't drink alcohol.

Patient Information

5) Other Tips

Carry food with you. You might be too sick to eat a lot of the time and then get hungry quickly. You should eat whenever you feel you can.

If you are at work, you could talk to your manager about taking breaks to give you time to eat.

- Wear loose clothes, especially around your waist.
- Sit or stand up when eating, try not to lie down for a couple of hours after eating.
- Avoid being very active and bending over after eating.
- Cooking smells can make you feel sick. Try not to cook, open windows, stay out of the kitchen if there is food cooking.
- Spend time outside to get fresh air. You may feel better if you don't get too hot.
- Keep a daily diary of how you feel. Try to notice when you feel best to eat.
- Try not to get overfull when you can eat.

6) Supplementation

Ginger supplements (approximately 1000 mg of ginger powder in capsules, taken in 3 or 4 doses through the day for 4 days) may be helpful to reduce nausea symptoms in early pregnancy.

If you have HG it is more likely that you will get it again in any future pregnancy. There is some evidence that taking a prenatal vitamin, for 3 months before you conceive, can help.

Advice on how to eat well during pregnancy by having a good variety of foods can be found on:

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/pregnancy-diet.html>

Further information about HG can be obtained from:

- HER Foundation: www.hyperemesis.org
- Morning Sickness Help: www.morningsicknesshelp.com
- About Pregnancy and Childbirth: www.pregnancy.about.com

Patient Information

- Baby Centre: www.babycentre.co.uk
- Support groups such as Pregnancy sickness support:
www.pregnancysicknesssupport.org.uk
- Royal College of Gynaecologists:
<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/pregnancy/pi-pregnancy-sickness.pdf>

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