Abdominal Pain in Pregnancy

Abdominal discomfort is not unusual throughout a pregnancy and in most cases is a harmless occurance. However, if you have abdominal discomfort or pain that continues even after rest or gets worse, you should call your caregiver. There are several causes of abdominal pain that may or may not be related to the pregnancy. Certain serious conditions are significant to the pregnancy depending on the time of the pregnancy and should be evaluated for the safety of the mother and baby.

Early Pregnancy (first trimester). Lower abdominal pain and pelvic cramping is common in the early weeks of pregnancy. Usually it is not from any serious problem. The cause is often not found. It usually gets better in a few days without treatment. Miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, or tubal pregnancy can also cause abdominal pain in the first trimester. Miscarriage is more likely if you also have vaginal bleeding or pass tissue. Ectopic pregnancy may be associated with vaginal bleeding. But the pain is usually in the lower right or left abdomen. Ectopic pregnancy pain is also more constant. It may also occur during a bowel movement. You should call your doctor immediately.

Mid-Pregnancy (second trimester). Abdominal pain and cramping are also common during the second 3 months of pregnancy. Usually this is not a serious problem and gets better within a few days. It may be serious if you also have vaginal bleeding, a fever, chills, nausea and vomiting or other serious symptoms. It can also be early preterm labor. You should call your caregiver.

Late pregnancy (third trimester). In late pregnancy, abdominal pain and cramping are very common. This is usually not a sign of a serious problem. False labor, preterm labor (before 37 weeks) or problems with the placenta, abruption (separation) can cause pain. You should be watched carefully if you have increasing pain, bleeding, fever, or other serious symptoms. You should call your caregiver right away, if you have upper abdominal pain with headache, vision problems or swelling of your hands and feet. It could be preeclampsia, a serious problem.

Abdominal pain may also be caused by problems unrelated to pregnancy and can occur at any time. Some of these are:

- Urinary infection.
- Gallbladder problems.
- Hepatitis
- Intestinal problems, virus, food poisoning, ulcer.
- Appendicitis.
- Pancreatitis

CONDITIONS THAT ARE COMMON BUT NOT SERIOUS DURING PREGNANCY:

- Constipation.
- Excess gas and bloating.
- Round ligament pain.
- Braxton-Hicks (false labor) contractions.
- Bad posture with excess use of your stomach muscles.

DIAGNOSIS

Tests for abdominal and pelvic pain in pregnancy may include:

- A complete exam with a pelvic exam.
- Measuring pregnancy hormone levels.
- Blood tests.
- Ultrasound exam.
- Fetal monitoring.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Avoid sex and do not put anything in your vagina until your symptoms go away completely.
- Get plenty of rest until your pain improves. If it is not improving in one hour, call your caregiver.

- Drink clear fluids if you are feeling sick to your stomach (*nauseated*). Avoid solid food as long as you are uncomfortable or sick to your stomach.
- Do not take any medications which have not been approved by your caregiver.

Be sure to see your caregiver as recommended for proper follow-up care.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Bleeding or leaking fluid, or passing tissue from the vagina.
- Increasing pain or cramping, or pain in the shoulder or back.
- Persistent vomiting.
- Painful or bloody urination.
- A temperature of 100º F (37.8º C) or higher with or without chills.
- A decrease in your baby's movements.
- Extreme weakness or fainting.
- Shortness with or without abdominal pain.
- Severe headache with or with out vision problems with abdominal pain.
- Convulsions.
- Abnormal vaginal discharge with abdominal pain.
- Persistent diarrhea.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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