



# Answers to Pregnancy Questions You Really Want to know

Now that you're pregnant, you might have a whole load of questions for your gynaecologist. Can't bring yourself to ask questions you might find embarrassing? Not to worry. **MH** has you covered.

WORDS CHRISTEL GERALYN GOMES

**P**regnancy is full of new, weird and sometimes embarrassing experiences. As a new mum (or even a repeat mum!), you have lots of questions. If you feel that your gynaecologist doesn't have time to answer the non-pressing questions or if you're just too shy to ask the intimate ones, *Motherhood* has you covered with our list of funny, crazy, or downright embarrassing questions!

## Will I poop during delivery?

A good question and a bit of a nightmare if you think about it, especially knowing that hubby and a whole bunch of doctors and nurses will be there to witness it! The short answer — yes, it's likely to be unavoidable. Some women try their best to eat as little as possible, go on a liquid diet or empty their bowels close to the time of delivery. However, doctors don't recommend that because you need your strength for the delivery.

Dr Seng Shay Way, specialist in obstetrics & gynaecology and consultant at Raffles Women's Centre has a few words of advice. "It really can't be stopped but keep in mind it's natural. While it may be humiliating and embarrassing to you, the doctors and nurses are used to it and it's simply routine. Just focus on your labour instead of what others are seeing."

Don't think about it. Once you're in labour, most women will tell you that modesty will fly out the window and your sole priority will be getting your baby out of you.

## I heard my baby will be covered in white goop after birth. What is that? Will it smell? Will my baby be given to me covered in it?

"The goop is actually called Vernix, which is a waxy cheese like substance that covers the baby's skin. It serves as a water repellent and moisturiser for the skin. It also helps to prevent heat loss soon after birth. Don't worry, it does not have any particularly strong smell," says Dr Ann Tan, gynecologist, obstetrician

and fertility specialist, Women Fertility & Fetal Centre.

Dr Ong Xiaohui, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Thomson Medical Center adds, "Yes most of the time, in uncomplicated births, the baby is handed over to the mother early with vernix still present. Usually, after the baby's first bath, the vernix is cleaned off."

## I'm in my first trimester and it feels like my vagina is leaking all the time — can you explain what's happening medically or hormonally?

According to Dr Ong, it is common to have vaginal discharge during pregnancy. "Some women may notice more discharge than usual. However, it is important to let your gynaecologist know, so as to exclude infection or premature rupture of membranes (water bag leakage). Most of the time, if there is no blood, if it is odourless and non-itchy, it is normal and due to increased hormone production and blood flow to the vagina in pregnancy," he says.

## Help! Why are my breasts so itchy?

"As the breasts enlarge quickly as the pregnancy progresses, the skin stretches rapidly and often, in general, the skin feels dry throughout the body, especially the tummy and breasts. Coupled with hormone fluctuations, these can cause itchy breasts. This is very common and I usually advise my patients to apply more moisturiser and nipple cream to the breasts," says Dr Ong.



## Is it normal that I can't control my pee during pregnancy or after delivery? What do I do?

Apparently, this is a common problem. Don't fret too much and wearing pantyliners or pads will help. The good news — it won't last forever! Dr Tan tells us, "As the hormones soften the ligaments in the pelvic and slows down the muscle action, one may not be able to control one's pee as well, particularly if it is not the first child. Practice pelvic floor exercises diligently. Pull up the pelvic floor muscles on the exhale and not on the inhale."

## What's happening to me — I'm burping and farting... A LOT!

This is certainly one of the more embarrassing side effects of being pregnant, especially if you're a working mum. There's not much you can do about it, though. According to Dr Tan, the hormone progesterone is responsible for slowing down the muscles of the intestines and digestion slows down. This leads to more gas, bloating, burping or farting. If you also feel like you are having indigestion, she advises that you eat smaller meals, cut out the oil, spice, and raw foods as they may be harder on your digestive system.

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## How do I tell if I have haemorrhoids? What caused it and what can I do?

“Haemorrhoids or piles mostly present with bleeding from your back passage and are related to other symptoms such as constipation and hard stools. Pregnancy can worsen constipation due to increased intra-abdominal pressure from your growing pregnancy belly. “You should see your doctor to confirm the diagnosis and your doctor will be able to prescribe you medications to relieve your symptoms such as stool softeners and medications to shrink the haemorrhoids. Increasing water and fibre intake in your diet will help as well,” says Dr Ong.



## Can I have sex during pregnancy, when do I have to stop and are there positions I must avoid?

Many new parents worry if sex will harm the baby. Experts will tell you that it's safe.

Dr Seng gives us his opinion, “It is safe to have intercourse, however, it is quite common to bleed during the first trimester and this can cause undue worries for the mother, so most doctors advise sexual activities only after the first trimester (after 12 weeks of pregnancy). Usually, if the pregnancy has complications like unexplained vaginal bleeding, preterm labour, preterm leaking of amniotic fluid, low lying placenta... then sex should be avoided.”

Where positions are concerned, Dr Seng explains that so long as you are comfortable, there is no need to avoid any particular position.

“As your pregnancy progresses, experiment to find what works best. Rather than lying on your back, for example, you might want to lie next to your partner sideways or position yourself on top of your partner or in

front of your partner. Let your creativity take over, as long as you keep mutual pleasure and comfort in mind,” he says.

## Will my vagina stretch out or become “loose” after pregnancy? I am worried that after delivery, sex will not be as pleasurable for my partner and myself.

“Yes, there will be stretching by the baby's head when it enters the vagina. Fortunately, the vagina is a very stretchable organ and in most cases, it can accommodate a baby. It will feel loose immediately after delivery but will slowly return to its pre-pregnancy state about six weeks after delivery. The vagina is a muscle, and like any muscle, it can be stretched. Usually, muscles bounce back because we use them a lot and they're quite elastic. They don't just stretch out; they come back in, too. But the vagina isn't necessarily like that because we don't engage those muscles very often. You can train your muscles to contract again so that you're not as loose and you both feel more sensation during sex,” says Dr Seng.

According to the doctor, some tips to help tighten your vagina after birth include:

- ♥ Doing kegel exercises
- ♥ Squeezing and relaxing during sex so you learn to control how loose you are
- ♥ Trying different positions — some positions feel naturally more snug
- ♥ Trying to hold something in your vagina

## Why am I suddenly having erotic dreams? Is it hormone related?

According to Dr Tan, it is common that some women find that they often dream more or remember their dreams more vividly during pregnancy. “This may be related to them experiencing more

anxiety or excitement. They may also be having sexual intercourse less frequently with their partners due to changes in their mood and body. Physical changes such as bigger breasts and increased blood flow to the genital organs may also contribute to having more erotic dreams,” she says.

## In your experience, is it likely for a husband to go off sex after watching their wife deliver? Do some men feel traumatised after seeing and smelling all the blood and body fluids? What is it like in the delivery room?

Dr Tan believes that this is possible. “Some men have found it hard to have sex after watching the birth of their child naturally especially if they are turned off by the sight of blood. In the delivery room, the fathers are usually seated beside the head of the bed. His role is to support his wife's head and encourage her to bear down. If they have been to antenatal classes together, he should be able to help her through the birthing process,” she says.

Dr Ong, on the other hand, stresses that this is a very subjective thing — it can bring the couple closer as well. “I think it all depends on the individual. For the majority of my deliveries, the husbands are present during birth and they look more happy and excited than traumatised. Most of them are focused on supporting their wives during the process. There is always anxiety and excitement, followed by relief, joy and sometimes tears once the baby is born. I always feel these moments are very precious and touching, and I feel truly lucky to be part of this important moment in their lives... it keeps me going and fuels my passion for the job.” ■