

Pregnancy Concerns

A guide by PANDAS

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This guide is for anyone who is, or plans to be, pregnant. It aims to answer your questions about pregnancy and labour, and point you to trusted resources where you can find out more.

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Pregnancy

Finding out you are pregnant can be a time of planning and excitement. For many others it is filled with worry and anxiety.

Changes to the body during pregnancy can leave you with normal symptoms and conditions, but there are also times that you may need to seek medical advice.

Here we have put together some resources and information to help address any worries that you may have around pregnancy.

What are the signs and symptoms of pregnancy?

The first sign is usually a missed period, but symptoms can be different for everyone

Symptoms vary between people, and not everyone notices symptoms when they have them. The [NHS](#) lists the first signs of pregnancy as:

- **A missed or very light period**
- **Feeling nauseous**
- **Feeling very tired**
- **Sore breasts**
- **Needing to pee more often**
- **Changes in smell and taste**

The best way to tell whether you are pregnant is with a pregnancy test. Sometimes an at-home pregnancy test can give you a false negative, so try again after a week or so if you think it might be wrong. It's very rare to get a false positive on a test.

To find out more: Take a look at Patient.info's guide; [Early signs of Pregnancy: What to look out for](#)

How will the NHS support me in my pregnancy?

The NHS will support you throughout your pregnancy via midwife-led or consultant-led care

When you first find out you are pregnant, you can speak to your GP, or self-refer to a midwife or maternity service by contacting your local hospital or NHS trust.

If your pregnancy is considered to be **high-risk**, you will be assigned consultant-led care. If you are deemed to be low-risk, your care will be midwife-led. In both cases, you will meet with a **variety of different medical professionals** throughout the pregnancy for scans and tests, checkups, general advice and planning the birth itself.

You can expect to have around 10 appointments in total throughout your pregnancy.

To find out more: The **NHS website** has a useful guide which breaks down what to expect from your antenatal care. For even more detail, **this guide for healthcare professionals** explains what midwives should be checking at each appointment.



It is important to start your antenatal care as early as possible. The first appointment usually happens before 10 weeks of pregnancy.

Tommy's

Will I receive care from the same midwife throughout my pregnancy?

You can request the same midwife, but it is not guaranteed

Having the same midwives and medical professionals support you throughout your pregnancy is called “continuity of care”. There is currently no legal right to have continuity of care, but it is something which health trusts in the UK do try to provide.

You can ask your midwife whether your health service can offer continuity of care and if you are eligible.

To find out more: take a look at [this guide from Birthrights](#) for more information on what you can do if your provider isn't able to offer you continuity of care.

Is it normal to bleed during pregnancy?

Bleeding or spotting during the first 12 weeks may be nothing to worry about, but you should always get checked by a healthcare professional at the earliest opportunity

There are a few reasons why you might see bleeding or spotting during early pregnancy, but most people who experience this still go on to have a successful pregnancy. [This article from Emma's Diary](#) explains some of the common reasons for bleeding or spotting in the first few weeks.

Even though it may be nothing to worry about, you should always contact your GP or midwife if you get any bleeding or pain. In some cases, [bleeding can be a sign of something wrong](#).

If you experience heavy bleeding, severe pain in your stomach or shoulder, or dizziness, visit A&E to get checked over as soon as possible.

To find out more: The [NHS](#) and [Tommy's](#) websites have info on causes of bleeding during pregnancy.

What are common side effects during pregnancy?

Every person and their pregnancies are individual so symptoms will vary from person to person

Everyone's pregnancy is different, so you may see some side effects but not others. The [NHS](#) lists some of the most common side effects as:

- Constipation
- Cramps
- Feeling hot or faint
- Incontinence and peeing a lot
- Skin changes
- Varicose veins

These are normal and usually nothing to worry about. But [some side effects can be more serious](#). There are so many health problems that are common in pregnancy that it can be hard to fit them all into one list. So, if your symptom isn't listed, it doesn't mean it's not normal.

To find out more: Take a look at other lists from [Patient](#), which includes nausea and acid reflux, and [Tommy's](#), which includes bleeding gums and swollen ankles.

Should I be worried about morning sickness?

Morning sickness is very common and usually poses no risk to your baby

You may experience nausea and vomiting in early pregnancy, but it will usually have stopped by weeks 16-20 – [according to the NHS](#). Despite the name, it can occur at any time of day or night.

There's not much you can do about it, but getting lots of rest and changing your food habits can help.

Around 3 in 100 women will experience a more severe version of pregnancy sickness called Hyperemesis Gravidarum. This is when your sickness gets in the way of you doing daily activities and eating and drinking normally.

To find out more: If you're finding morning sickness challenging, [Pregnancy Sickness Support](#) can offer help and advice to get you through it.

What can I do to have a healthy pregnancy?

There's lots of advice available from food and exercise to travel and work

The [NHS guide to Keeping well in pregnancy](#) is a good place to start.

For a longer guide, you can work through in your own time, [NHS Wales has a downloadable magazine-style guide](#) with 134 pages of advice from pregnancy to birth.

To find out more: [SANDS](#) have lots of clear and easy to digest advice on their website.

What's normal when it comes to my baby's movements?

Most pregnant people will start to feel their baby move between 16 and 20 weeks

Once you begin to feel them, your babies' movements will continue even through labour and delivery. Make time to sit and feel your baby and take a mental note of movements throughout the day.

If your babies' movements feel reduced at any time, call or visit your Maternity Assessment Unit. They will place you on a CTG monitor, which will assess babies heart rate and movements.

You are never a bother, and you are never wasting anyone's time, if you are concerned you need to seek assistance from the Maternity Assessment Unit.

To find out more: Read about your babies movements on the [NHS England](#) or [NHS Scotland](#) websites.



Do not use a home doppler (heartbeat listening kit) to try to check the baby's heartbeat yourself. This is not a reliable way to check your baby's health.

NHS

Can I take medication while pregnant?

Most medications will reach the baby, so it's important to check they are safe

Before taking any medicine when you're pregnant, including painkillers, check with your pharmacist, midwife or GP that it's okay, and ask if there are any side effects.

This is the case both for medicines prescribed by a doctor and for medicines you buy from a pharmacy or shop (NHS England: [Medicines in pregnancy - NHS](#)).

To find out more: Visit [Bumps - Best use of medicines in pregnancy](#) for more around medications and pregnancy.

What is a birth plan?

A record of what you'd like to happen when you give birth

The term 'birth plan' refers to a list of your preferences for giving birth. It includes details like whether you would rather a home or hospital birth and what pain relief you would prefer.

Things do not always go to plan, so try to look at all the options open to you and list your preferences, rather than just choosing one thing or another. This will help you to avoid not meeting your own expectations. It might be more helpful to think of it as a 'birth choices' list instead of a 'birth plan'.

You don't have to write down your plan, but it can be good to talk through all the options with your midwife anyway. That way you know what your choices will be ahead of time.

To find out more: Visit the birth plan templates on the [NHS Website](#) and [Tommy's](#).

What should I pack in my hospital bag?

Things to make you more comfortable during labour and after birth

It's a good idea to have your hospital bags packed by the time you're about 36 weeks pregnant. Keep them near the door so they can be grabbed in a hurry. [Tommy's](#) advise packing things such as:

- Antenatal notes
- Drinks and snacks
- Music, books or devices to help you relax
- Phone and charger
- Items to make your more comfortable
- Newborn nappies
- Maternity pads

Check their [website](#) for a full list.

To find out more: NHS Frimley have a great [video guide](#) to packing your hospital bags.

Labour

Anticipation of labour can feel scary, whether you've given birth before or not.

Knowing what to expect, what pain relief options there are, and how your medical team can help you will make sure you're prepared and feel in control when the time comes.

What are the signs that labour has begun?

A 'show', waters breaking, or contractions are the main signs that labour has begun

A 'show' is when the pink, jelly-like mucus that plugs your cervix comes away and passes from the vagina. This is part of the process of your body preparing for birth.

Another part of this process is when the sack of fluid surrounding your baby breaks away – this is known as your water breaking. It might feel like a slow trickle or a sudden gush of liquid coming from your vagina.

Contractions happen when your body is starting to move your baby into position for birth. You will feel your abdominal muscles tighten and release in waves that can feel like period cramps. They become more frequent the closer you are to giving birth.

To find out more: The [NHS England](#) and [Scotland](#) websites have a more detailed list of signs to look out for.

What happens if I go over my due date, beyond 40 weeks?

Options will be discussed with you regarding an induction with your GP or obstetrician

From time to time induced labour may be discussed with you if the medical team advise that this would be of clinical benefit to mother and or baby.

You can read more about some of the possible reasons you may be offered an induction and how it is done on the [NHS website](#).

Some people try to induce their own labour in a number of different ways. There's no scientific evidence that these methods work, but feeling in control can relax you, which might help bring on labour. Herbal supplements are generally not recommended to induce labour.

To find out more: [AIMS](#) explains what we know about inducing labour and the risks involved.



During the latent stage, it's a good idea to have something to eat and drink because you'll need energy for when labour is established.

NHS

What are the stages of labour?

There are 3 stages of labour, from the first twinges to delivering the placenta after the baby is born

The first stage of labour can begin without you even knowing as your body starts to get ready to deliver a baby. In this stage you will have contractions, your water will break, and your cervix will start to dilate.

Once you are fully dilated you enter the second stage, and you are ready to give birth.

After your baby is born, you enter the third and final stage of labour. This is where you deliver the placenta.

To find out more: [This guide from Tommy's](#) breaks down what to expect at each stage.

What are the pain relief options?

There are a wide range of medicated and non-medicated options for you to choose from

Medicated pain relief options include gas and air, opioid injection, epidural and IV drip. Some of these can have side effects, and some can't be used using the birth itself, [according to the NHS](#).

A water birth is a popular non-medicated option which can help you relax and make contractions less painful. A TENS machine is another option which uses electrical nerve stimulation to lessen contraction pain. Other complementary options include acupuncture, aromatherapy and massage.

It's a good idea to learn about the pain relief options and have a think about what you would like ahead of time. But you can usually change your mind on the day.

To find out more: LabourPains.org is a website dedicated to explaining all the different pain relief options available to you.

What is assisted birth?

When a doctor uses tools like forceps or a suction cup to help deliver the baby

If your baby needs to be born soon but labour isn't progressing how it should, your doctor might advise an assisted birth. This might seem scary, but is quite normal. Around 1 in 3 people having their first baby will need an assisted birth.

You will be given pain relief like an epidural, and might be moved to an operating theatre. This is just a precaution in case the doctors need to perform an emergency C-section.

The doctor will then either use forceps (a bit like tongs) or a suction cup attached to the baby's head to help you deliver them.

To find out more: Both the [RCOG](#) and [Tommy's](#) have useful guides on assisted birth.

What are my birth options after a previous caesarean?

You can either give birth vaginally or plan for another caesarean

Having a caesarean does make future births a bit more complicated. But many people who have had caesareans go on to have vaginal births with no problems.

If you or your midwife have concerns about giving birth vaginally, you can plan to have another caesarean. This can carry more risks and will take longer to recover from.

To find out more: [This guide from the RCOG](#) explains all your options and the pros and cons of each.

Where can I give birth?

Most people give birth in hospital, but you can choose a home birth

Most people give birth in an [NHS hospital](#). This means you'll have a team of midwives, doctors, and [other healthcare professionals](#) available if medical support is needed. Your midwife will discuss the options available in your area but you can choose any maternity services.

If you are considering a [home birth](#), it's important to tell your midwife early so a plan can be put in place. Sometimes a transfer to hospital may still be needed.

You can choose to have a home birth without a midwife with you (unassisted birth). If you do, you can change your mind at any time during your pregnancy or labour. NHS midwives will always be available to support you.

To find out more: Visit the [NHS guide on where to give birth](#).

What types of birth are there?

Vaginal birth, planned or emergency caesarean

A vaginal birth is when your baby is born through your vagina. Sometimes this involves help using [forceps or a suction cup \(ventouse\)](#). This is called an assisted birth.

A caesarean section, or C-section is an operation to deliver your baby through a cut made in your tummy and womb. A caesarean may be planned in advance, or done in an emergency if it's thought a vaginal birth is too risky.

To find out more: The [RCOG guide to birth options](#) explains your choices clearly.

Maternal Mental Health During Pregnancy

Pregnancy can bring excitement and joy, but for many it can also feel uncertain or emotionally overwhelming.

Hormonal changes, physical adjustments, and the shift in identity that comes with becoming a parent can all have an impact on mental wellbeing. These feelings are common, but that doesn't mean they have to be managed alone.

Here we have brought together some information and support to help you understand what you might be experiencing, and where to turn if you need help.

Why is my mental health affected during pregnancy?

Hormonal and physical changes, and the anticipation of becoming a parent can all affect how you feel.

Pregnancy can change how you feel, physically and emotionally.

You might notice your thoughts are more focused on being pregnant, or that you're not feeling quite yourself. While these feelings are normal, they can sometimes be overwhelming. If feelings of anxiety or sadness become persistent, it's important to speak to your [midwife](#) or [GP](#).

To find out more: The [PANDAS GP Toolkit](#) is designed to support your conversations with healthcare professionals.

What are the signs of perinatal mental illness?

Persistent low mood and anxiety while pregnant.

Some symptoms of perinatal mental illness include:

- Persistent low mood or anxiety
- Intrusive thoughts that are frightening or distressing
- Feeling unable to cope with the changes in your body
- Obsessive behaviours or repetitive thoughts (known as Maternal OCD)
- Tokophobia, which is a fear of giving birth

These experiences are more common than many people realise and are treatable with the right support.

To find out more: [PANDAS Foundation Support Services](#) are available for you, your partner and your support network.



Mental health problems are among the most common complications in pregnancy.

Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2023

Pregnancy loss and baby loss

Losing a baby is an incredibly emotional and life-altering experience. It can bring a range of feelings, from sadness and anger to guilt and confusion. It is important to remember that grief is unique to each person, all feelings are valid and there's no right or wrong way to grieve.

Baby loss can also affect your mental and physical health, with feelings of isolation, fatigue, and difficulty sleeping. It's natural to need time to process the loss, and seeking support can help with healing. Many people find comfort in talking to others who have been through similar experiences.

What support is available for those experiencing baby loss?

You don't have to go through this alone. Reaching out for support, whether through loved ones, groups, or professional help, can be an important part of the healing process

In the UK, support for baby loss is available through charities and organisations such as:

- [**Sands**](#) – Helpline with weekday daytime and evening opening hours and email support, as well as online and in-person support groups and resources
- [**Tommy's**](#) – Helpline and email support run by midwives and specialist line for Black and Mixed Black women and birthing people, both available 9-5 Monday to Friday
- [**The Lullaby Trust**](#) – Bereavement helpline with weekend opening hours and befriending service
- [**The Miscarriage Association**](#) – Helpline, live chat, Facebook group and forum specifically aimed at those who have miscarried, or experienced molar or ectopic pregnancy
- [**Cradle**](#) – Weekly online support group meeting and forum for anyone who has experienced any kind of pregnancy loss
- [**Petals Charity**](#) – Free baby loss counselling service and closed Facebook support group

More useful resources

Guidelines

- NICE: [Women's and reproductive health guidelines | Hub | NICE](#)
- RCOG: [Browse our patient information | RCOG](#)

Finances

- GOV.UK: [Pregnancy and birth - GOV.UK](#)

Community Support

- PANDAS: [Peer to peer support for you, your family and your network](#)

Continued →

Podcasts and blogs

- Listen to experts discuss a wide range of pregnancy-related topics in **The Midwife's Caldron Podcast**. Find it [here](#) or wherever you listen to podcasts.
- [Dr Sara Wickham's website](#) hosts many great resources, from blogs and guides to podcasts.

Accessing Support

Talking Therapies

- NHS England: [Find care for your mental health before, during and after pregnancy](#)
- NHS Scotland: [Living Life | NHS 24 & We're here for you | Parent Club](#)
- NHS Wales: [Health A-Z : Counselling](#)
- CBT: [Overview - Cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#)
- EMDR: [Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing – NHS Talking Therapies](#)

Perinatal Mental Health Care Pathways and Services

- NHS England: [NHS England » Perinatal mental health](#)
- NHS England: [perinatal-mental-health-care-pathway.pdf](#)
- RCOP: [What are perinatal mental health services](#)
- NHS Scotland: [Perinatal Mental Health Network Scotland – National Managed Clinical Network](#)
- NHS Wales: [Perinatal Mental Health](#)
- NHS Wales: [PNMH Programme and Pathways](#)



PANDAS

Thank you

Hope for Parents