

THIRD TRIMESTER EDUCATION

Changes to Your Body

The following is a list of changes and symptoms that you may experience during the third trimester:

- Your fetus radiates body heat, causing you to feel hot from increased skin temperature.
- The increased urinary frequency returns due to increased pressure being placed on the bladder.
- Blood pressure may decrease as the fetus presses on the main vein that returns blood to the heart.
- Swelling of the ankles, hands and face may happen (called edema), as you continue to retain fluids.
- Hair may begin to grow on your arms, legs and face due to increased hormone stimulation of hair follicles. Hair may also feel coarser.
- Leg cramps may happen more often.
- Braxton-Hicks contractions (false labor) may begin to happen at irregular intervals in preparation for childbirth.
- Stretch marks may appear on the stomach, breast, thighs and buttocks.
- Colostrum (a fluid in the breasts that nourishes the baby until the breast milk becomes available) may begin to leak from your nipples.
- Dry, itchy skin may persist, particularly on the stomach, as the skin continues to grow and stretch.
- Your libido (sexual drive) may decrease.
- Skin pigmentation may become more apparent, especially dark patches of skin on the face.
- Constipation, heartburn and indigestion may continue.
- You will have increased white-colored vaginal discharge (leukorrhea), which may contain more mucus.
- Backaches may persist and increase in intensity.
- Hemorrhoids may persist and increase in severity.
- Varicose veins in the legs may persist and increase in severity.

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Fetal Development

During the third trimester, your fetus continues to grow in size and weight. The lungs are still maturing, and the fetus begins to position itself head down. By the end of the third trimester, the fetus is about 19 to 21 inches long and weighs, on average, 6 to 9 pounds. Fetal development during the third trimester includes:

- The fetus can see and hear.
- The brain continues to develop.
- The kidneys and lungs continue to mature.
- By the 36th week, the head may “engage” (drop into the pelvic area), a process called lightening.
- The bones of the skull remain soft to make it easier to pass through the birth canal.
- For many babies, the irises of the eyes are slate blue. The permanent eye color will not appear until several days or weeks after birth.
- The fetus can suck its thumb and has the ability to cry.
- By 38 to 40 weeks, the fetus’ lanugo (fine, soft hair on the body and limbs) has disappeared almost completely.
- By 38 to 40 weeks, the lungs have matured completely.
- The baby is covered in vernix caseosa (or simply called vernix), a creamy, protective coating on the skin.
- The head will usually turn downward during the last couple of weeks of pregnancy.

