

# Health worries

Dr Dawn Harper answers your most pressing questions about pregnancy

**Q** I've got really bad morning sickness. I haven't told my boss I'm pregnant yet – help!

**A** Morning sickness is caused by a combination of low blood sugar and pregnancy hormones. Eating little and often helps. If you don't want to tell your colleagues your good news just yet, take plenty of snack supplies to work with you. High-carbohydrate foods, like dry toast and cereal, are best. Ginger has natural anti-nausea properties so stock up on ginger tea. Morning sickness usually passes by four months, so hang in there. (If the vomiting is very severe and there is a risk of dehydration, seek urgent medical advice.)

**Q** I'm six months' pregnant and have puffy, swollen ankles. What can I do?

**A** At other times of life, swollen ankles can be a symptom of kidney or liver problems, and



prolonged swelling or swelling higher up the body in pregnancy can be a sign of pre-eclampsia (see below). Otherwise, swollen ankles are very common and are caused by fluid retention and distended leg veins. Put your feet up when you can and avoid sitting cross-legged, standing still for long periods or wearing high heels, as these encourage fluid to build up in your ankles. Gentle exercise, such as brisk walking, and support tights, can help.

**Q** I had pre-eclampsia with my first child and am now expecting my second with a new partner. Will I get it again?

**A** Pre-eclampsia is a condition that only occurs during pregnancy. It causes high blood pressure, protein in the urine and swollen ankles. If left untreated it can become life-threatening for both mother and baby. The risks of pre-eclampsia are greatest in a first pregnancy, but I'm afraid a previous episode does increase the likelihood of it happening again. Also, because you have a new partner, your body will react to this pregnancy as if it was your first one. Have a chat to your consultant obstetrician, who will be able to assess your risks and may suggest low-dose aspirin or calcium supplements, which have been shown to help some women. Don't start either without taking medical advice though – they are not right for everyone.

**Q** Is there such a thing as antenatal depression? I'm 30 weeks pregnant and seem to spend all my time in tears.

**A** There certainly is, but sadly it is not talked about much. Some experts believe it is as common as postnatal depression, which affects 12-13 per cent of mums. The causes can be hormonal, but it has also been linked to a family history or past experience of depression, or to stressful events like moving house or relationship problems. Anxiety about pregnancy itself may also be a factor, especially if you've had trouble conceiving or have experienced miscarriage. Please talk to your midwife or GP.

**Q** How can I tell whether contractions are Braxton Hicks or the start of labour?

**A** Braxton Hicks contractions are 'practice contractions' and are your body's way of preparing for labour. Most women feel them during the final few months of pregnancy. They last for about 30 seconds and although uncomfortable, they shouldn't be painful – it's more of a tightening sensation. They do get more frequent as pregnancy progresses, but won't form a regular pattern. The real thing is easy to recognise as the contractions will become so intense that you have to stop what you're doing, and they will come regularly every 5 to 20 minutes. ■

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- To find your nearest Tesco Pharmacy log on to [www.tesco.com/storelocator](http://www.tesco.com/storelocator) or call the number above.

