

The third trimester often feels the longest in terms of the physical annoyances that creep in during the last three months of pregnancy. Here are some suggestions for easing the common aches and pains that bedevil you right through to the end of your pregnancy. In most cases, the aches and pains are harmless and just uncomfortable but see below for those rare occasions when you should be concerned.

Complaint	Cause	For relief, try this	Avoid this	Call your birth attendant if:
Constipation	Pressure from the uterus causes the stomach to empty more slowly, so stools are harder and drier.	Drink at least eight glasses of water every day; eat several servings of whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables every day; don't ignore the urge to go.	Commercial laxatives	All measures other than laxatives have failed. You have severe abdominal pains.
Hemorrhoids	Varicose veins in the rectum; straining on the toilet	Try to avoid constipation; soak in a warm (not hot) bath; apply ice packs for acute pain.	Commercial hemorrhoid preparations; straining during a bowel movement; sitting on the toilet for long periods	
Varicose veins	Increased blood volume; slower blood flow	Wear support hose and put them on before you get out of bed; sit with your legs elevated; rock in a rocking chair.	Standing or sitting in one position for long periods	
Frequent urination	Pressure from your growing uterus on your bladder	Avoid drinking within an hour of bedtime; after urination, gently lift your uterus to release the last drops.	Limiting your fluid intake, except just before bedtime	You have pain when you urinate (a sign of infection).

Complaint	Cause	For relief, try this	Avoid this	Call your birth attendant if:
Heartburn	As your baby fills your abdomen, your stomach empties more slowly and acid can back up.	Eat frequent, small meals; eat mildly flavored foods; walk after meals.	Spicy, fatty, or acid foods; antacids, unless your birth attendant approves; eating a large meal before bedtime	Heartburn worsens significantly. You are nauseous or vomiting often.
Fatigue	Added weight	A short nap in the afternoon, if possible; meet your body's demand for rest.	Caffeine: more than one or two cups of coffee a day has not been proven safe in pregnancy	Naps don't help (you may be anemic).
Leg cramps	Fatigue; pressure on nerves from the uterus; occasionally a calcium deficiency	Stretch your lower leg by flexing your foot upward; walk as much as you can; eat an extra serving of milk or yogurt daily.	Calcium or vitamin supplements unless your birth attendant approves	A hard, painful lump develops in your leg (can be a blood clot).
Backache, pain down the buttocks and leg	Loosening of muscles in preparation for labor; forward pull of the uterus; pressure of the uterus on nerves	A gentle back rub you straddle a as a chair and lean on the back; check your posture: head erect, shoulders back and down, stomach pulled in; simple back exercises such as the pelvic tilt; acetaminophen; if your birth attendant approves.	Analgesics other than acetaminophen; wearing high-heeled shoes; the pregnant woman's natural tendency to slouch	The pain prevents you from going about your daily activities.
Swollen hands, feet, and ankles	Increased blood volume; pressure from the uterus slows blood flow and causes fluids to pool around your hands and feet.	Take off any rings before they get too tight; keep your feet elevated and rotate your feet at the ankles; rock in a rocking chair; soak in a tepid bath; sleep on your left side.	Diuretics, limiting fluids or salt consumption; wearing high-heeled shoes	Swelling suddenly gets worse; you have severe headaches or feel dizzy; your vision is blurry (signs of pre-eclampsia, or high blood pressure).