Managing Tummy Troubles During Pregnancy

Growing a baby is hard work, and it often comes with a side of extra hunger as your body fuels the little one inside. While the idea of "eating for two" is a common myth, changes in hunger levels, digestion, and food tolerance are very real. For example, you might sit down to enjoy a meal you've eaten countless times before, only to experience sudden heartburn that just won't quit. Or you may plan a short outing and unexpectedly find yourself searching for the nearest restroom due to an upset stomach. These common experiences can be both frustrating and surprising. Symptoms such as heartburn, indigestion, upset stomach, and diarrhea can disrupt daily routines, interfere with sleep, and make even simple moments feel uncomfortable during pregnancy.

Comfort plays a vital role in promoting both physical and emotional health. This includes maintaining balanced nutrition, staying hydrated, being physically active (safely) and trying to get enough quality rest. Comfort is not a luxury; it is an important part of staying healthy for both you and your baby. However, it's important to remember to check your usual remedies to make sure they can also be used during pregnancy.

Bismuth subsalicylate is an over-the-counter medicine often used to treat symptoms such as nausea, heartburn, indigestion, upset stomach, and diarrhea. Once bismuth subsalicylate reaches your stomach and intestines, it separates into salicylic acid (which the body can absorb) and bismuth compounds that are mostly not absorbed. Bismuth subsalicylate is related to aspirin, as they are both in a group of mediations called salicylates. Products that include this ingredient are Pepto-Bismol®, Bismatrol®, Diotame®, Kaopectate®, and Kao-Tin®.

Can Products Containing Bismuth Subsalicylate Be Used During Pregnancy?

In general, products that contain bismuth subsalicylate are not recommended for use during pregnancy, especially during the second and third trimesters. Here is why:

- Bismuth subsalicylate is related to aspirin, which is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) medication. NSAIDs can increase the chance of certain risks in pregnancy, such as bleeding complications.
- There are concerns about the effects on the fetal kidneys and lower levels of amniotic fluid (the fluid that surrounds the fetus during pregnancy).
- There are concerns about effects on the fetal heart and blood vessels if taken in the later stages of pregnancy. This can cause high blood pressure in the fetal lungs (pulmonary hypertension).

Luckily, there are other ways to help manage those annoying tummy troubles. ***Note: Be sure to use medications and other treatments as directed on the label or by your healthcare provider.***

- For heartburn and indigestion: Antacids like calcium carbonate (Tums®) can be used as directed in pregnancy. Using them may also help with your calcium intake.
- For nausea: Vitamin B6 supplements, doxylamine (an antihistamine), or ginger have been recommended by healthcare providers. Your provider may also suggest prescription medications if needed.
- For diarrhea: It is important to stay hydrated. Your provider may recommend medication depending on the cause and severity of your condition.
- MotherToBaby has fact sheets on these exposures:
  - Regular Strength Aspirin
  - Calcium carbonate
  - Doxylamine succinate-pyridoxine hydrochloride
  - Ginger

Always check with your healthcare provider before taking any medication during pregnancy, even if it is over the counter. They can talk with you about your symptoms and what treatment is best for you.

What If I Already Took Pepto-Bismol?

First, do not panic. One dose is unlikely to cause harm. But it is still a good idea to mention it to your healthcare provider, especially if you are in your second or third trimester. They can help assess whether any follow-up is needed and reassure you moving forward. They can also talk with you about the best way to treat your symptoms during pregnancy.

Pregnancy can already feel uncomfortable at times, so dealing with stomach issues on top of everything else can be frustrating. While some common ingredients like bismuth subsalicylate aren't recommended during pregnancy, there are options that can help you feel better. When in doubt, it's okay to ask your healthcare provider or a MotherToBaby specialist. Remember, taking care of your comfort is an important part of taking care of your pregnancy.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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