

Gastric Reflux in Pregnancy

Gastric reflux, or heartburn, is a common medical problem that tends to worsen during pregnancy. The pregnancy hormones relax the muscle that keeps the stomach contents from backing up into the esophagus. Also, the growing uterus pushes on the stomach, facilitating the reflux.

The following are some steps you may take to minimize the problem:

- Avoid greasy, spicy, or difficult to digest foods.
- Do not eat a heavy snack before lying down, and try to eat your evening meal earlier in the afternoon or evening. The idea is not to lie down with a full stomach.
- You may consider elevating the head of the bed to minimize the stomach content backing up into the esophagus.
- Use an antacid. These are substances that help neutralize the stomach acid content. Options include: Mylanta, Gelusil, Tums, among others.
- I favor the use of calcium carbonate tablets (Tums is a brand name). Calcium carbonate is an excellent antacid, and in addition provides extra calcium that may help in preserving your bone mineral content.
 - Do not purchase the brand name "Tums" (more expensive). Consider the pharmacy generic that come in a plastic bottle and are multi-colored (tutti fruit type). They are very inexpensive, especially those purchased at discount stores such as Sams and Costco.
 - You may chew 2-3 tablets whenever you have symptoms, or about 2 hours after meals and at bed time.
 - In general, there is no limit on how many of these you can have... the body may keep some of the calcium, the rest is discarded. The only exception may be for folks with kidney stones, they should limit the calcium intake to about 1.5 grams of calcium per day (about 6 tablets of the chewable type).
- If the calcium tablets or other antacids are not sufficient to control the problem, the next step is to use a medication such as Pepcid, Zantac, or Tagamet. These are category B for pregnancy and can be used safely, particularly after the first trimester of pregnancy (once the baby is completely formed). You may use the over the counter preparation for any of the above, or obtain a prescription from your doctor or me for the full strength preparation. While taking any of the above, you may continue using the calcium carbonate tablets. The two work independently.
- Keep in mind that these medicines need to be taken regularly for them to be effective. They work by decreasing the formation of acid. If you wait until the symptoms appear, only the calcium tablet will help. The Pepcid and other related ones take a few hours to be effective