The Third Trimester

WEEKS 28–40

Final preparations — you're almost there!

THE MIDWIFE
EDUCATE ♥ EMPOWER ♥ SUPPORT

The third trimester is a time of rapid growth and final development. Your baby is gaining weight, organs are maturing, and both you and your baby are preparing for birth!

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON A FETAL LEVEL?

WEEK 28	WEEK 29	WEEK 30	WEEK 31	WEEK 32	WEEK 33	WEEK 33	WEEK 34	WEEK 35	WEEK 36	WEEK 37	WEEK 38	WEEK 39–40
												
Eyes open and close, brain continues to develop, and baby begins to practice breathing movements.	Baby is gaining weight quickly. Bones are hardening and lungs continue to mature.	Baby can hear your voice and recognize familiar sounds. Movement may be very active.	Brain development accelerates. Baby can open and close their eyes and is gaining body fat.	Lungs are maturing and baby is stacking on fat. Bones are strong, but still soft.	Baby is positioning for birth (usually head down). Immune system continues to	Most babies are head down. Lungs are nearing full maturity.	Baby is considered "late preterm" to term. Organs are mature and baby continues to gain weight.	Baby is full term! Lungs are fully developed. Baby may drop lower into your pelvis (lightening) as birth approaches.	Baby is ready for birth any time. Nails are fully grown and developed.	Baby is ready for birth any time now and [illegible]	Final growth and brain development. Baby's grasp is strong and most organ systems [illegible]	Baby is full term and continuing to gain a little weight. Body is fully developed and ready for life outside the womb.

COMMON THIRD TRIMESTER DISCOMFORTS
(AND HOW TO FIND RELIEF)

DISCOMFORT	WHY IT HAPPENS	WHAT CAN HELP
Pelvic pressure & lower back pain	Baby's weight, hormonal changes, and loosening ligaments put pressure on the pelvis and back.	• Prenatal support belt • Good posture and supportive shoes • Pregnancy-safe stretches and exercise • Warm compresses, massage, or heat pack
Shortness of breath	Growing uterus pushes on the diaphragm, making it harder to take deep breaths.	• Rest and take breaks • Sleep with extra pillows • Practice slow, deep breathing • Avoid lying flat on your back
Heartburn & indigestion	Hormones relax the esophagus and the growing uterus puts pressure on the stomach.	• Eat smaller, frequent meals • Avoid spicy/greasy/acidic foods • Don't lie down after eating • Elevate head of bed, use antacids (ask provider)
Swelling (edema)	Increased blood volume and pressure on veins can cause fluid retention, especially in the feet and ankles.	• Elevate your feet when resting • Wear comfortable shoes • Stay hydrated • Limit excess salt intake • Wear compression stockings (ask provider)
Frequent urination	Baby's head presses on the bladder.	• Empty your bladder regularly • Limit fluids close to bedtime • Kegel exercises may help
Constipation	Slower digestion due to hormones and pressure from the growing uterus.	• Increase fiber (fruits, veggies, whole grains) • Stay hydrated • Gentle exercise (like walking) • Stool softener (ask provider)
Braxton Hicks contractions	Uterus practicing for labor, usually irregular and painless.	• Rest, hydrate, and change positions • Warm shower or bath • If contractions are regular, painful, or don't improve — contact your provider.
Trouble sleeping	Physical discomfort, frequent urination, heartburn, and hormonal changes.	• Use a pregnancy pillow • Find a comfortable side-lying position (preferably left side) • Create a bedtime routine • Limit caffeine and screen time
Varicose veins & hemorrhoids	Increased blood volume and pressure on pelvic veins.	• Wear compression stockings • Avoid prolonged standing or sitting • Stay hydrated and increase fiber • Use topical treatments (ask provider)
Increased fatigue	Your body is working hard to support your growing baby and prepare for birth.	• Rest when possible • Stay hydrated and eat nutrient-dense foods • Let others help • Listen to your body

WARNING SIGNS
(WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER)

Contact your healthcare provider right away if you experience any of the following:

- **Vaginal bleeding**
  Any bleeding should be evaluated.
- **Leakage of fluid**
  A sudden gush or continuous leaking of fluid from the vagina (possible rupture of membranes).
- **Regular, painful contractions**
  Contractions that are getting stronger, closer together (every 5 minutes for 1 hour), or not improving with rest and hydration.
- **Decreased fetal movement**
  If you notice a significant decrease in movement after 28 weeks, contact your provider.
- **Severe headache, vision changes, or spots**
  Could be a sign of high blood pressure or preeclampsia.
- **Sudden or severe swelling**
  Especially in the face, hands, or with headache/vision changes.
- **Severe abdominal or pelvic pain**
  Especially if persistent, worsening, or one-sided.
- **Fever**
  A temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher.
- **Trouble breathing or chest pain**
  Should be evaluated promptly.
- **Any sudden or concerning change**
  If something feels "not right," it's always okay to reach out.

Trust your instincts — you know your body best.
It's always okay to contact your healthcare provider with questions or concerns.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR A HEALTHY THIRD TRIMESTER

- Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, lean protein, and whole grains.
- Stay hydrated. Aim for 8–10 glasses of water daily.
- Keep moving. Gentle exercise (like walking) if approved by your provider.
- Prioritize rest and quality sleep.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs, and limit caffeine (generally < 200 mg/day).
- Keep all prenatal appointments.