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## Pregnancy and Sleep Disorders

### Insomnia

[Insomnia](#) is one of the most common sleep disorders. Insomnia's primary symptoms include difficulty going to sleep, difficulty maintaining sleep, and waking up too early without being able to go back to sleep.

Pregnant women often report symptoms of insomnia due to stress and anxiety about labor, delivery, motherhood, and balancing parenting with work or school. Other pregnancy related problems such as discomfort, back pain, and fetal movements also contribute to sleep loss.

### Restless Leg Syndrome

Restless leg syndrome (RLS) is a condition characterized by sensations in the legs such as cramping, itching, aching, burning, creeping, or pulling that occur when the legs are at rest, most notably while in bed.

The symptoms are relieved only by moving the legs temporarily. Shortly after movement, the legs begin to develop the sensations again. These uncomfortable feelings can make sleep difficult, as the need to constantly be moving the legs to reduce symptoms keeps sufferers awake.

Nearly 26% of women report symptoms or RLS during pregnancy, with symptoms at peak during the 7th and 8th month of pregnancy. Most RLS symptoms disappear within one month of delivery.

Sometimes this may be due to iron deficiency (low iron levels in blood) – try to increase your dietary intake of iron rich foods (see our list of iron rich foods on our website).

Taking extra iron or magnesium supplement may be an option.

**DO NOT start any extra supplements before talking to you doctor!**

## Sleep Apnea

**Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)** is a sleep disorder characterized by interrupted breathing during sleep as a result of an obstruction of the upper airways. Fatty tissues of the throat relax and collapse back into the airways during sleep. The results are loud snoring followed by pauses in breathing, and then gasping or choking sounds as the brain partially wakes from sleep to force the body to increase breathing effort. These partial awakenings from sleep reduce the overall quality of sleep making sufferers experience **excessive daytime sleepiness** during the daytime. Morning headaches are also associated with lower oxygen levels in the blood.

Women who are already overweight are more likely to develop sleep apnea as a result of an excess build up of fatty tissues in the throat due to the added weight gain experienced during pregnancy.

## Nocturnal gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)

GERD, or heartburn, is a frequent complaint among pregnant women. Heartburn in pregnant women can be attributed to a few occurrences during pregnancy most notably are hormonal changes that cause the digestive system to slow down including muscles in the esophagus that push food down. Another contributing factor to GERD is the growing uterus putting pressure on the stomach and sometimes pushing stomach acids up into the esophagus.

Symptoms of GERD can worsen during sleep as the sufferer lays down, allowing the acids to move up into the esophagus more easily.

## Frequent Urination

The need to use the bathroom frequently at night can disrupt sleep as expecting mothers often wake multiple times in the night for bathroom breaks. These frequent trips disrupt sleep patterns and can cause symptoms of daytime fatigue.

Please talk to your doctor if you have any concerns about Sleep apnea, GERD, Restless Leg Syndrome, or Insomnia.