

What to Expect at 17 Weeks of Pregnancy: Preparing for Labor and Self-Care



Highlights

Fetus weighs 100-150 g and measures 11-13 cm, about the size of a pear.

Subcutaneous fat forms, giving the body a fuller appearance.

Major organ systems—including heart, lungs, kidneys, and nervous system—continue rapid maturation.

Immune system begins producing antibodies.

First fetal movements (quickening) often felt by mother.

Maternal body adjusts with increased blood volume, mild swelling, leg cramps, and occasional shortness of breath.

Nutrition, physical activity, and prenatal care are critical for maternal and fetal well-being.

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Fetal Growth and Physical Development

At 17 weeks, the fetus is growing rapidly:

Weight: 100-150 g

Length: 11-13 cm (crown to rump)

Comparable size: A pear

Appearance: Body gains volume and looks fuller due to subcutaneous fat development.

Limbs and movements: Arms and legs grow longer and more proportional. Hands and feet are well-formed, and the fetus starts making coordinated movements.

Organ System Maturation

Cardiovascular system: Heart pumps vigorously, circulating approximately 25-30 liters of blood per day in the fetus.

Respiratory system: Lung tissue develops; diaphragm movements prepare for future breathing.

Digestive system: Stomach and intestines begin more coordinated peristalsis.

Renal system: Kidneys start producing small amounts of urine.

Immune system: Production of immunoglobulins and interferons begins, preparing the fetus for postnatal immunity.

Endocrine system: Adrenal glands secrete hormones; thyroid activity supports metabolism and development.

Dental development: Tooth buds for permanent teeth form.

Nervous System and Sensory Development

Auditory system: Fetus can recognize and react to sounds. Sudden loud noises may cause a startle reflex, while maternal voice may soothe.

Vision: Eyes respond to light; fetus may turn head toward bright stimuli.

Motor skills: Movements are more coordinated; stretching, bending, and slight kicks occur.

Reflexes: Swallowing and sucking motions begin, preparing for postnatal feeding.

Maternal Sensations at 17 Weeks

Quickening: Many women feel the first light fetal movements, usually described as flutters. Movements increase in frequency and intensity over the coming weeks.

Cardiovascular changes: Increased blood volume can cause mild edema, shortness of breath, gum bleeding, and occasional nosebleeds.

Fatigue and weakness: Thyroid and hormonal shifts may lead to mild tiredness or leg cramps.

Skin changes: Some women notice increased sweating or pigmentation changes (linea nigra).

Uterine and Abdominal Changes

The uterus is about 5 cm below the navel and continues to expand.

Abdominal contour changes due to fetal growth and weight gain.

Shifts in internal organs may cause: Mild heartburn
Constipation
Frequent urination
Shortness of breath

Mild heartburn

Constipation

Frequent urination

Shortness of breath

Breasts may secrete colostrum in preparation for lactation.

Mild heartburn

Constipation

Frequent urination

Shortness of breath

Pain, Discharge, and Bleeding

Mild discomfort: Lower back pain, ligament stretching, leg pain, or abdominal twinges are normal.

Warning signs: Severe pain, persistent bleeding, or abnormal discharge (green, yellow, brown, or bloody) require urgent medical attention.

Vaginal discharge: Normal is whitish, odorless, and uniform in texture.

Fever, Cold, and Immunity Considerations

Low-grade fever (~37°C) is normal; higher temperature with cold symptoms requires treatment.

Safe remedies: Hydration, rest, saline rinses, and herbal inhalation (if approved by a physician).

Medications: Only paracetamol is recommended; aspirin and other drugs may be harmful.

Placental protection: The fetus is partially protected, but maternal illness can still affect well-being.

Miscarriage Risk in the Second Trimester

Risk is significantly lower than in the first trimester but still possible due to toxicity, congenital anomalies, or severe maternal illness.

Regular prenatal checkups, fetal heartbeat monitoring, and ultrasound imaging are key for early detection.

Lifestyle, Stress, and Safety

Avoid high-stress situations and loud environments.

Sleep on the left or right side; avoid lying on the back or stomach.

Wear loose, comfortable clothing; choose shoes with low, stable heels.

Prevent falls, trauma, or injuries during daily activities.

Maintain emotional well-being, as maternal stress can affect fetal nervous system development.

Nutrition and Vitamins

Fresh fruits and vegetables, leafy greens, lean meats, fish, and dairy products.

4-5 small meals daily to aid digestion and prevent overeating.

Cooking methods: steaming, baking, boiling; avoid fried, spicy, and processed

foods.

Stay hydrated: 2 liters of water per day.

Iron sources: liver, spinach, seafood.

Vitamin supplements: A, B, C, D, E, K, H, iodine, folic acid, zinc, iron, calcium, selenium, magnesium. Supplements are complementary to a balanced diet.

Physical Activity Recommendations

Safe activities: Prenatal yoga for breathing, flexibility, and stress relief.

Aqua aerobics or swimming for low-impact exercise. Moderate gym workouts with professional guidance.

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Stop activity if experiencing fatigue, pain, or shortness of breath.

Prenatal yoga for breathing, flexibility, and stress relief.

Aqua aerobics or swimming for low-impact exercise.

Moderate gym workouts with professional guidance.

Sexual Activity Guidelines

Safe if there are no medical contraindications.

Avoid positions that compress the abdomen.

Restrictions may apply for multiple pregnancy or miscarriage risk.

Recommended Tests and Examinations

Routine blood and urine tests, blood pressure, weight, uterine height, and fetal heartbeat.

Triple test: hCG, free estriol, and alpha-fetoprotein to assess genetic risk.

Additional tests as indicated by physician.

Ultrasound and Fetal Imaging

May be done to check: Fetal heartbeat and growth Anatomical development

Amniotic fluid and placental condition Determination of fetal sex if visible

Fetal heartbeat and growth

Anatomical development
Amniotic fluid and placental condition
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Tools and Assistance

Medical consultations and online support groups for guidance.
Pregnancy tracking apps for weekly updates on fetal growth.
Prenatal exercise programs: yoga, swimming, and low-impact aerobics.
Meal planners and nutrient trackers.
Home monitoring: blood pressure, weight, fetal heartbeat devices.