

# What to Expect at 24 Weeks of Pregnancy: Preparing for Labor and Self-Care



## Highlights

Baby: 21-33 cm long, 530-600 g.

Rapid brain development and sensory maturation.

Beginning of fat deposition; skin becomes less red and smoother.

Strong fetal movements, hiccups, and exploration of the womb.

Maternal weight gain, mild swelling, breast changes, and digestive adjustments.

Importance of nutrition, hydration, vitamins, physical activity, and routine check-ups.

## In This Article

Baby's development at 24 weeks

Fetal movements and sensory responses

Maternal body changes

Common discomforts and warning signs

Nutrition and supplementation

Physical activity and fitness

Sexual health considerations

Prenatal tests and ultrasounds

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## **Baby Development at 24 Weeks**

At this stage, the fetus undergoes significant growth and organ maturation:

**Size & Weight:** 21-33 cm long, weighing around 530-600 g. Fat layer starts forming; cheeks, limbs, and abdomen will gradually fill out over the next few weeks.

**Brain & Nervous System:** The brain now weighs ~100 g, with more developed folds. Midbrain and cerebellum are nearly complete. Neural pathways for movement, sensory input, and reflexes continue to strengthen.

**Musculoskeletal System:** Baby can kick, stretch, roll, grab the umbilical cord, and make somersaults. Sleep cycles are established (16-19 hours of sleep per day).

**Respiratory System:** Lungs produce surfactant, a substance that helps alveoli expand after birth. Preterm babies at this stage may survive with neonatal care.

**Sensory Development:** Baby can detect light, respond to sounds, distinguish tastes, and begins forming fingerprints. Eyelids may start to blink in response to bright light.

**Face & Features:** Facial structure fully formed, including eyebrows and eyelashes. Expressions can be observed via ultrasound.

## **Fetal Movements**

Space in the womb is sufficient for free movement.

Movements include gentle nudges, rhythmic kicks, and hiccups.

Baby explores the surroundings: touching the umbilical cord, pressing on the uterine wall, shifting positions, and moving limbs.

Temporary inactivity is normal due to sleep cycles. Absence of movement for more than 24 hours requires consultation.

## **Maternal Body Changes**

**Weight Gain:** Expect gradual weight increase; by 24 weeks, total gain should not exceed 7 kg.

**Sweating & Fatigue:** Increased metabolic demand can cause mild fatigue, drowsiness, and sweating. Balance physical activity with rest.

**Swelling:** Mild morning edema may occur; manage by limiting salt, staying

hydrated, and elevating legs. Consult a doctor if swelling worsens.

Breast Changes: Colostrum may appear; use absorbent pads if necessary.

## Abdominal Changes

Belly becomes visibly rounded.

Skin may itch due to stretching; stretch marks may appear.

Discomfort in the lower back and sides is common due to uterine growth.

Shifts in posture and walking patterns (waddling gait) occur due to the changed center of gravity.

## Uterine Growth

Uterus is ~24 cm above the pubic bone.

Pressure on surrounding organs may cause constipation, bloating, heartburn, and frequent urination.

## Possible Problems and Warning Signs

Pain: Mild pain in the lower back, lower abdomen, legs, or hemorrhoid area is common. Severe or increasing pain should be reported.

Illness: Avoid exposure to contagious infections; fever or persistent illness should prompt medical attention.

Vaginal Discharge: Any abnormal color (yellow, green, brown), odor, or consistency should be evaluated by a healthcare provider.

## Nutrition & Supplementation

Balanced Diet: Include fruits, vegetables, berries, grains, bread, pasta, legumes, nuts, greens, and healthy fats like olive oil.

Protein Sources: Fish, seafood, white meat, eggs, dairy, and yogurt at least once per week.

Avoid: Alcohol, excessive sugar, fried foods, highly salty or spicy dishes.

Iron & Vitamin C: Beef, buckwheat, persimmon, pomegranate, cherries, bell peppers, and seaweed.

Fiber & Hydration: Fruits, vegetables, and at least 1-2 liters of water daily.

Vitamins: Prenatal vitamins recommended, especially for women >30, dietary restrictions, or cold season pregnancies. Consult a doctor before starting

supplements.

## **Physical Activity**

Maintain fitness through daily walks, prenatal yoga, aquaaerobics, and light gym exercises.

Avoid prolonged sitting or lying; consistent, moderate activity helps prevent excess weight gain and musculoskeletal pain.

Regular exercise supports circulation, reduces swelling, and improves sleep.

## **Sexual Health**

Sexual activity is generally safe unless complications exist (gestosis, low amniotic fluid, cervical issues, multiple pregnancy).

Avoid pressure on the abdomen and maintain comfort for both partners.

## **Prenatal Tests and Ultrasound**

Routine tests: complete blood count, urine analysis, blood sugar; vaginal swab if needed.

Ultrasound is not routinely scheduled at 24 weeks unless medically indicated.

Can assess growth, detect anomalies, and determine sex.

Blood tests monitor hemoglobin, red and white blood cells, platelets, and infection markers.

Urine tests evaluate urinary system health.

Blood sugar test checks for gestational diabetes risk.

## **Tools and Assistance**

Educational resources: Books, videos, articles on nutrition, exercises, and labor preparation.

Pregnancy apps: Track weekly fetal growth and maternal changes.

Prenatal classes: Childbirth preparation, breastfeeding, and parenting skills.

Healthcare support: Gynecologist consultations, helplines, and medical advice platforms.

Maternity aids: Support bands, pregnancy pillows, compression socks.