

What to Expect at 26 Weeks of Pregnancy: Preparing for Labor and Self-Care



Highlights

The fetus weighs approximately 850 g and measures about 23-36 cm.

Movements become stronger and more noticeable.

The mother may experience shortness of breath, frequent urination, and back discomfort.

Important fetal organs and systems continue maturing.

Nutritional intake, physical activity, and prenatal check-ups remain essential.

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Maternal Sensations at 26 Weeks

At 26 weeks gestation (seventh month of pregnancy), most women experience regular fetal movements. The body works harder than in the second trimester, often causing fatigue, mild weakness, and sleepiness. Breast tissue begins preparing for lactation.

Shortness of breath is common due to the enlarged uterus pressing on the diaphragm. Increased pressure on the bladder may cause more frequent urination, similar to early pregnancy stages.

Emotionally, expectant mothers often feel deeply connected to their baby. The "nesting instinct" may develop, motivating home organization or preparation for the newborn. While this is normal, it is important to avoid physical overexertion and stress. Supportive family guidance can help manage these impulses safely.

Fetal Development

At this stage, fetal development is advanced:

Brain and Nervous System: Neural connections continue forming; memory begins developing, allowing recognition of the mother's voice.

Sensory Development: The fetus can distinguish tastes and sounds. Eyes may open, and reactions to bright light or loud noises become noticeable.

Musculoskeletal System: Bones strengthen, and subcutaneous fat accumulation increases body mass.

Organs: Lungs practice breathing movements; adrenal glands produce vital hormones. Milk teeth buds develop, and permanent tooth formation begins.

Sexual Development: Genital organs are fully formed. For female fetuses, the uterus and vagina are complete; in males, testicles begin descending.

Approximate size:

Length: 23-36 cm

Weight: ~850-900 g

Fetal Movements

The fetus sleeps up to 18-21 hours daily, spending remaining time awake and moving. Movements can indicate comfort or discomfort, and parents can often feel them by placing a hand on the abdomen. Tracking movement frequency and intensity helps ensure fetal health. Abnormal patterns may require medical evaluation.

Common Maternal Changes and Concerns

Discharge: Increased, whitish mucus is normal due to the forming cervical plug. Colored, foul-smelling, or blood-stained discharge requires urgent medical attention.

Pain: Abdominal, back, leg, or pelvic discomfort can result from fetal movements, muscle stretching, or mild Braxton-Hicks contractions.

Uterus: Measures approximately 25 cm in height and 17 cm in width; protrudes visibly. Pressure on digestive and urinary organs may cause constipation, heartburn, or hemorrhoids.

Heart and Circulation: Monitor for swelling, varicose veins, or elevated blood pressure.

Fetal Heartbeat: Normal rate is 120-160 bpm. Irregular but brief arrhythmias are usually harmless, but persistent irregularities require specialist observation.

Maternal Health Monitoring and Tests

Regular prenatal visits include:

- Blood pressure and weight measurement
- Fundal height and abdominal circumference
- Fetal heartbeat monitoring and positioning
- Urine and blood analysis
- Vaginal flora swab

Ultrasound may be performed if necessary to assess fetal growth, organ development, or anomalies. At 26 weeks, fetal sex can be determined with high accuracy.

Nutrition and Vitamins

Balanced, nutrient-rich meals are crucial:

Essential nutrients: Protein, folic acid, vitamins B, C, D, E, calcium, potassium, iron, magnesium

Recommended foods: Whole grains, lean meat, fish, vegetables, fruits (washed), dairy products, prunes

Hydration: ≈1.5 liters of water daily

Limit processed, fried, overly sweet, or salty foods.

Vitamin supplements should be taken under physician supervision to ensure safety and effectiveness.

Physical Activity

Moderate exercise supports maternal health and fetal development:

Prenatal yoga, stretching, and low-impact aerobics

Walking and swimming

Home exercises targeting back, legs, and pelvic floor

Guidelines: Only exercise if feeling well; avoid overexertion; consult a healthcare provider for restrictions

Sexual Health

Intimacy is generally safe unless contraindicated by the obstetrician (e.g., risk of preterm labor, complications). Positions should avoid abdominal pressure. Communication with the partner and attention to comfort are important.

Tips for Expectant Mothers

Prioritize rest: sleep at least 8 hours, ideally on the side with pregnancy pillows

Wear supportive maternity wear and footwear

Apply stretch-mark prevention creams

Engage in safe, moderate physical activity

Attend prenatal classes to prepare for birth

Track fetal movements daily for early detection of irregularities

Tools and Assistance

Pregnancy tracking apps

Fetal movement diary

Weight and blood pressure monitoring devices

Prenatal exercise guides and videos

Telemedicine consultations with obstetricians