

What to Expect at 31 Weeks of Pregnancy: Preparing for Labor and Self-Care



Highlights

Marks the third trimester, approaching the 8th month of pregnancy.

Fetus weighs 1.5-1.6 kg and measures around 40 cm.

Subcutaneous fat accumulates; body forms are rounded and defined.

Brain, respiratory, and digestive systems continue maturing.

Daily fetal movements are important indicators of well-being.

Increased physical and emotional demands on the mother; rest and self-care are essential.

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Pregnancy Timeline: 31 Weeks in Months

31 weeks corresponds to roughly 7 months of pregnancy.

Approximately 29 weeks since conception \ (from fertilization\).

Most mothers are on prenatal leave, allowing focus on self-care and fetal bonding.

Daily monitoring of fetal movements and maternal well-being is essential.

Fetal Development at 31 Weeks

Weight: 1,500-1,600 g

Length: ~40 cm

Fetus resembles a miniature newborn.

Subcutaneous fat accumulates, giving the body rounded, defined shapes.

Brain cells multiply rapidly; the nervous system continues maturing.

Sensory responses improve: the fetus reacts to light, sound, and touch.

Eyelids can blink; iris pigmentation begins, determining eye color.

Respiratory system matures; alveoli form and surfactant is produced.

Pancreas secretes insulin, and the liver produces bile for digestion.

The fetus develops a sleep-wake cycle, alternating between rest and active movements.

Fetal size comparison:

Pomelo

Length: 40 cm

Weight: 1,600 g

Maternal Changes and Physical Symptoms

Pregnancy at this stage is physically and emotionally demanding.

Breast changes: fullness, sensitivity, darker areolas, occasional colostrum.

Braxton-Hicks contractions may occur; these are preparatory contractions.

Fetal movements are noticeable daily, sometimes waking the mother or affecting sleep.

Common late-pregnancy discomforts: fatigue, weakness, sleepiness, back pain, leg cramps, and digestive issues.

Fetal Movements and Behavior

Movements are important indicators of fetal health.

Fetal kicks, stretches, and nudges are well perceived by the mother.

Family members can feel movements by placing hands on the abdomen.

Tracking movements is crucial to detect potential issues early.

Common Discomforts and Potential Complications

Back pain due to added weight and spinal stress; a maternity support belt can help.

Digestive discomfort and hemorrhoids due to pressure on intestines.

Leg cramps from fluid retention and calcium deficiency.

Preterm labor risk: early contractions, abdominal pain, vaginal bleeding, or amniotic fluid leakage require immediate medical attention.

Vaginal discharge: normal discharge is light, milky, and odorless; any sudden color, odor, or irritation should prompt a medical check-up.

Yeast infections (vaginal candidiasis) are common but treatable.

Blood pressure and edema monitoring is critical due to risk of late-pregnancy complications like preeclampsia.

Warning Signs and Preterm Labor

Seek immediate medical attention for:

Regular, strong contractions

Vaginal bleeding or fluid leakage

Severe lower abdominal pain

Decreased fetal movement

Prenatal Testing and Ultrasound

Prenatal check-ups occur twice weekly at this stage.

Routine tests include: Blood and urine tests Vaginal swab for microbial analysis Antibody titers if Rh conflict exists

Blood and urine tests

Vaginal swab for microbial analysis

Antibody titers if Rh conflict exists

Third-trimester ultrasound evaluates: Fetal growth, organ development, and position
Placental maturity and amniotic fluid levels
Possible determination of fetal sex if previously unknown

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Nutrition, Rest, and Lifestyle Recommendations

Maintain balanced nutrition with protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

Stay hydrated: ~1.5-2 liters of water daily.

Eat small, frequent meals to avoid digestive discomfort.

Prioritize rest and sleep; fatigue is normal due to high physical demands.

Engage in light physical activity: walking, prenatal yoga, or stretching.

Intimacy During Late Pregnancy

Sexual activity is generally safe unless restricted by medical conditions.

Monitor comfort levels and avoid positions causing strain.

Sexual rest may be advised in cases of multiple pregnancies or preterm labor risk.

Tools & Assistance

Pregnancy tracking apps and fetal movement logs

Prenatal support belts and comfortable clothing

Telemedicine consultations with obstetricians

Online childbirth and breastfeeding courses

Guidelines for hospital bag packing and newborn essentials

Relaxation and mindfulness tools for stress management

At 31 weeks, both mother and fetus undergo significant changes. The fetus continues rapid growth and organ maturation, while the mother faces increasing physical and emotional demands. Proper nutrition, regular monitoring, and preparation for birth are key to ensuring a healthy final trimester.