

Heartburn, constipation & piles



Heartburn & acid reflux occur when hormones relax the valve at the top of your stomach & acid surges up into your oesophagus (gullet). Often it's worse at night & you may need to sleep propped up on pillows. Your midwife can prescribe antacid medicine but excess use may interfere with absorption of vitamins & minerals. Foods which trigger heartburn include rich, spicy, fried foods, tea, coffee, alcohol, sugar & certain E additives in processed foods. Eat small frequent meals so your stomach doesn't get overfull, which causes pressure on the stomach valve. Eat raw garlic daily, or take garlic capsules – ensure you buy capsules which are rich in allicin, the active ingredient. Herbal remedies include ginger, slippery elm tablets, or camomile or dandelion root tea, but *don't* take dandelion if you're diabetic (including pregnancy diabetes) or on drugs for high blood pressure. Homeopathic pulsatilla works for many mums but consult a qualified homeopath if you're no better after 5 days. Complementary therapies such as osteopathy, chiropractic, yoga, tai chi or Alexander technique may also help.

Constipation occurs because hormones relax & slow gut activity. Drink at least 3 litres of water daily & start the day with hot water & lemon. Avoid too much strong tea as tannin increases constipation. Start meals with raw salad or fruit, & eat foods high in fibre (roughage) & vitamin C eg oranges, blackcurrants, dried prunes, celery, spinach, artichokes & wholegrain cereals, but limit wheat products as gluten "clogs up" the gut. *Don't* eat bran & bran foods unless you increase your fluids, as it makes the stool hard & may interfere with iron absorption, causing anaemia. Dandelion tea may help but senna, a traditional remedy, is too strong in pregnancy. Use aromatherapy oils eg orange, lemon & lime, 3-4 drops in the bath. Choose homeopathic remedies for your precise symptoms, eg nux vomica if you have backache with the constipation, kali carb if you're worse at night, graphites if you're worse when cold or lycopodium if you're worse when hot. Massage the arches of your feet (reflexology zones for the intestines) in a circular, *clockwise* motion, about 5 minutes on each foot. Clockwise tummy massage may help if it's not too uncomfortable. In severe cases, acupuncture, osteopathy or chiropractic will help.

Piles (haemorrhoids) are varicose veins in the rectum & may cause itching & bleeding. It's important to avoid constipation which puts more pressure on the veins. Try hammamelis or witch hazel lotion if the piles protrude outwards, or cypress aromatherapy oil in the bath to shrink them. Homeopathic pulsatilla is often effective for minor piles, or consult a homeopath for more specific advice. Bach Rescue Remedy cream may also ease discomfort. Acupuncture or osteopathy are useful in severe cases.

Always inform your midwife if you are using complementary therapies or natural remedies