

Your 9-month emotional ROLLERCOASTER

Know what to expect, and you can ride out the lows and make the most of the highs

Whether pregnancy is something you've waited for your whole life, or has come as an exciting surprise, your growing bump brings with it an array of emotional ups and downs. But once you understand what's behind them, you can ride the rollercoaster with confidence and enjoy your pregnancy all the more. Here's what you need to know...



MEET THE EXPERT

Dr Penelope Law has been a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist for over 20 years, and practises at The Portland Hospital for Women and Children.

CONCEPTION

Even before you miss that first period, a release of progesterone might leave you feeling emotional and teary. And PMS-like symptoms such as bloating and cramping as your uterus begins to thicken might make you feel uncomfortable.

6 WEEKS

By now you'll have taken a test and the result? Positive - hooray! When you discover you're pregnant you're likely to experience a whole flood of emotions, from exhilaration and disbelief to anxiety about *actually* becoming a parent. It's a heady mixture, so don't be surprised if you find yourself snapping at your partner, or fret that you're having some glum moments when you think you should be feeling over the moon. 'It's around the six-week mark that you'll start to notice changes to your body,' says consultant obstetrician Dr Penelope Law. Some mums-to-be report feeling sluggish, and it's not unusual to find yourself struggling to keep your eyes open in the middle of the day right now. This drop in energy levels can leave you feeling drained and a little overwhelmed. Fluctuating blood sugar levels, which regulate energy levels, are behind this fatigue. 'The best way to combat it is to eat little and often, even if you don't feel like it, as this will even out any blood sugar dips,' suggests Dr Penelope.

It worked!

'Morning sickness made me feel really anxious. To combat symptoms I kept a kettle in my bedroom and every morning I'd have a mug of peppermint tea and a banana before getting up.'
Samantha Ledgerwood, 29, from Essex, is mum to Oliver, two



8 WEEKS

You might suffer morning sickness during the second half of your first trimester, and the effects of this can hit you emotionally as well as physically. The queasiness is driven by rising levels of the hormone human chorionic gonadotrophin (HCG), which *double* every two to four days during the first 8-11 weeks. So, it's no wonder you feel green around the gills. 'HCG is produced by the cells that surround the embryo, which go on to become your placenta. And it's the combination of HCG with gastric acid that can make you feel nauseous,' explains Dr Penelope. While nausea can lower your mood, reminding yourself that this feeling comes because you're growing a placenta to nourish your baby can really help.

My weepy ways

'I'm pregnant while renovating a house, and cry over ridiculous things like paint colours! My husband has been amazing. He's even invented a non-alcoholic G&T!'
Holly Kirkcaldy, 32, from Bristol, is mum to Ava, three, and 14 weeks pregnant



10 WEEKS

Time to take a deep breath and hold onto the sides of the carriage of this crazy rollercoaster you're on! A continuous rise in oestrogen and progesterone can wreak havoc on your emotions at this point of your pregnancy. So, one minute you'll be blissfully happy, and the next a blubbery mess, sobbing just because you burned your cheese toastie. 'The combination of tiredness, impending thoughts of labour and how you'll manage afterwards on top of these hormones can be overwhelming,' says Dr Penelope. Extra hugs and reassurance from your partner is the answer. You'll also be extra-sensitive to the emotions of others, so don't worry if you find yourself crying over adverts for animal charities.

12 WEEKS

The 12-week mark can signal a sharp rise in the smiling stakes. It's at this point that many expectant parents share their happy news. It'll be a big relief to be able to be open about your morning sickness too. Any tiredness will reduce now, and you're probably showing slightly and feeling proud of your teeny bump. You've also hit one of the biggest pregnancy milestones, as it's time to catch a first glimpse of your baby! The 12-week ultrasound is a chance to analyse his growth and development. 'It's normal to feel apprehensive before the scan,' says Dr Penelope. But you'll soon be showing your scan photos to everyone and won't be able to stop grinning.

Body bliss

'My new pregnancy curves have made me feel happy about my body. I can wear bodycon even if I've had a big dinner!'
Kat Harper, 35, from London, is mum to Henry, two, and 12 weeks pregnant



16 WEEKS

You're now well into your second trimester, and those hormonal peaks and troughs will even out, as will your emotions. If it's not already, then morning sickness will soon be a distant memory: 'Levels of HCG take over your placenta around 16 weeks, and from this point on many women start to feel quite good,' explains Dr Penelope.

Loved up

'In my second trimester, I felt really well and confident, and definitely noticed an increase in my libido too!'
Carla Wilkinson, 35, from London, is mum to Joshua, nine months



18 WEEKS

Was that wind – or did you just feel your baby move? If you haven't felt his wiggles yet, then it won't be long, and you're likely to be feeling a strong connection with him by now. And all those positive remarks about your dewy complexion and thicker tresses will be pumping up your body confidence. 'From 18 weeks onwards, women are often very happy with their appearance. The increasing supply of insulin-like hormones that help your baby grow can result in positive physical changes,' says Dr Penelope. Blood volume also increases, causing more blood flow, resulting in great skin. 'Women also produce more melanocytes, the cells responsible for skin pigmentation, so you're likely to retain that summer glow for longer,' she adds. And make the most of your new-found curves and bigger boobs with some stretchy maternity clothes that flatter your figure.

28 WEEKS

Now that you've reached the last leg of your pregnancy, you'll be feeling relaxed and this carefree feeling coupled with increased blood flow and extra vaginal lubrication could result in a big libido boost. 'This can also be a result of an increase in oestrogen,' adds Dr Penelope.

Feeling great

'I had a great pregnancy and, even though I had heartburn and indigestion, I still found that my libido was higher.'

Philippa Ricketts, 27, from Staffordshire, is mum to Nate, two months



Last time

'My first thought when I woke up in labour with my fourth baby, Harrison, wasn't my usual happy, "I'll get to meet my baby today" – it was, "I'll never be pregnant again", which made me feel quite sad as I loved all my pregnancies.'

Liane Chalmers, 39, from the Isle of Wight, is mum to Harrison, one



And relax...

'I suffer from a bad back, which was worse in pregnancy and sleeping was nearly impossible. I did a course with thecalmbirthschool.com and listening to the guided meditation in bed helped me to relax and drift off.'

Marie Salem, 35, from London, is mum to Arlo, six months, and Cassian two



32 WEEKS

If you've been keeping fit and active through your pregnancy, you may start to feel a little frustrated now, as the size of your bump makes simple tasks like tying your shoelaces a chore. 'Around this time, a hormone called relaxin can also make your joints quite flexible, and for some women the loosening of the bones in their pelvis can be painful,' says Dr Penelope. Focus on what you can do, rather than what you can't. Prenatal yoga will keep you strong and supple, and practising deep breathing will help you feel calm and regulate your moods.

37 WEEKS

You'll be feeling lots of conflicting emotions right now, from sheer joy at the thought you will soon meet your baby, to frustration that you can't even get out of the bath without a helping hand. You might also feel vulnerable, and it's not uncommon to experience a sense of resentment towards your partner. But give yourself a break – you're growing a gorgeous baby, and that's a big job, so it's OK to have all these feelings, and sometimes all within five minutes! You're likely to be on maternity leave by now, so give yourself time to think about your feelings and talk them through.

34 WEEKS

With constant trips to the loo, and trying to get comfortable in between, 78 per cent of mums-to-be have disturbed sleep at this point in pregnancy. And this lack of slumber disrupts the production of the happiness neurotransmitter, serotonin, and raises levels of the stress hormone, cortisol. This can trigger mood swings and feelings of anxiety. 'Take the time to have a warm bath and achieve a sense of calm before bedtime,' suggests Dr Penelope.

LABOUR AND BIRTH

Levels of the love-hormone oxytocin peak during labour, leaving you feeling euphoric. You will – literally – feel a rush of love towards your baby. And elevated levels of the feel-good neurotransmitter dopamine coursing through your body will also help strengthen the newborn bond. 'However, every labour is different, and it may take several days before you feel bonded to your newborn,' says Dr Penelope. So, however you're feeling, discuss your emotions with your midwife. And know that, in the grip of such powerful hormones and experiencing such life-changing events, you're not entirely in charge of this emotional rollercoaster: so share how you're feeling with those closest to you, and ride it with their help and support.

All woman

'When I was pregnant, I was the most body confident I've ever been. I felt in awe of how I was growing this tiny little person. My bump and new curves made me feel womanly.'

Tracey Davies, 29, from Grantham, is mum to Gracie, one, and Kaitlyn, four



Best reward

'The rush of love I had when Louie was born was indescribable. It was the biggest and most rewarding high I've ever experienced.'

Rachel Chapman, 27, from Kent, is mum to Louie, three

