

The best friend's
guide to **THE STUFF**



THAT
MAKES
YOU

BLUSH

Let's face it, pregnancy's not all glowing skin and shiny hair. So here's all you need to know about the more mortifying mum-to-be moments

Being pregnant is so exciting! You can't wait to show off your scan pictures and tell everyone about those first little kicks. But you're not exactly racing for the phone when your pee comes out at a bizarre angle or you let out another window-rattling fart.

Worrying about morning sickness at teatime and the logistics of a roll in the hay when eight months gone might be a long way from the rosy 'sniffing freshly laundered babygros' side of motherhood, but they're the questions that niggle all of us. Unfortunately, they're just too damn embarrassing to ask anyone – including your GP or midwife. That's where we come in, with the truths only your best friend would dare to tell you.

WHY HAS MY PEE
GONE WONKY?

Good grief, one minute you're peeing in a normal fashion, the next it's coming out like a dodgy hose pipe. What's going on? Pardon the pun, but your wee one's to blame. As your uterus expands in early pregnancy, it applies pressure on your bladder. So you feel the urge to nip out to the loo more. Later on, pressure from the baby, especially as the head engages, can harmlessly stretch and displace your urethra (that's pee pipe, to you) a bit, sometimes causing an off-kilter flow.

And the sneeze-pee thing? 'Hand me a tissue – and I don't mean for my nose.' Passing a little urine when you sneeze, cough or laugh is quite common, but it's not something to be ignored. Stress incontinence might be due to pressure from the baby, or it might mean there's a problem with your pelvic floor. Ask

your midwife for a leaflet on pelvic floor exercises to help strengthen the area. Altogether now... *squeeze!*

WHY DOES EVERYONE
SUDDENLY SMELL?

Phewee! Did your husband always pong and you were just too in love to care? And why does a whiff of your beloved espresso now make you feel queasy? Because pregnancy hormones heighten your senses. Your body knows what it wants so going off tea and coffee, say, might be its way of avoiding too much caffeine. That you can detect yesterday's socks on your partner is just his bad luck.

WHY ISN'T MY MORNING
SICKNESS JUST THAT?

It's a question many pregnant women ask themselves as they hang miserably over the toilet bowl at all hours of the day and night. The heavens are dubbed 'morning sickness' as they often hit then, but they can blight any part of the day as your body adjusts to – you guessed it – your new hormone levels. Your best defence is to eat little and often.

WHY AM I SO WINDY?

Whoops! There you go again. Pregnancy slows down the digestive process so food takes longer to pass through your intestines, creating more gas. Relax, it's normal. And better out than in, eh?

IS IT OK TO HAVE SEX?

Absolutely, unless your GP advises against it. While swinging from the chandeliers is out, you and your partner can enjoy some lurve at any time in your

pregnancy. You'll have to be inventive positions-wise to avoid pressure on the lower abdomen. But sex is encouraged as you near your due date or go over, as prostaglandins in sperm can trigger labour. True – if not exactly romantic.

HAS MY BRAIN
TURNED TO PORRIDGE?

One minute you're having a conversation, the next your mind goes blank and you're blinking like a Jack Russell trying to do algebra. You might think it's the ol' H word again, but it's probably simply that you've a lot to think about. With planning for a baby, trekking to work or caring for older children and running a home, it's no wonder your brain shuts down every now and again. Happens to the best of us.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN
I'VE HAD 'A SHOW'?

Is a 'mucus plug' as gross as it sounds? Um... Yes. It's a jelly-like discharge that can be clear or blood-streaked. Finding a 'show' in your pants is a sign that the neck of the womb has begun to ripen in readiness for the birth. But not everyone notices one and it's not a sign that you'll go into labour any minute. It could take another fortnight. So you've probably time to, y'know, change into fresh pants.

WILL I POO DURING LABOUR?

Probably not, but a bit could pop out in the general melee. As you go into labour you may find you need the loo a lot, as your bowels empty to make room for the baby's head to progress. Any, er, 'matter' left may be pushed out during delivery. Your midwife won't bat an eyelid as she discreetly removes it. Good on her!

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL
BE LOOKING AT MY NETHER
REGIONS ON THE BIG DAY?

Don't fret, they won't be selling tickets. If everything goes smoothly there'll only be you, your birth partner and one or two midwives with front-row seats. **M&B**

With thanks to Alison Holt, senior lecturer in Midwifery at the University of Central Lancashire.

Words: Sharon Wright. Photograph: Ruth Jenkinson

FIVE SECRETS ABOUT GIVING BIRTH... REVEALED

- 1** You will babble and gable and giggle under gas and air or anaesthetic, but no-one will care.
- 2** After nine months of fretting about being seen in the buff, when labour kicks off you won't give a stuff.
- 3** In those first precious photos after the birth you will look like a very, very

happy person who has also just been run over by a bus.

- 4** You'll see the most beautiful newborn in the world – everyone else'll see a squidgy red prune face, albeit a very cute one.
- 5** Achieving your first bowel movement after giving birth will fill you with almost as much joy and relief as your new baby.