

MOTHER NATURE KNOWS BEST – HOW TO COPE WITH MORNING SICKNESS

By Stephanie Jackson

At a time when the miracle of new life is unfolding, Mother Nature inflicts great misery upon women – in the form of morning sickness. The bouts of nausea and vomiting suffered by many pregnant women were first recorded some 4000 years ago, but the cause has remained a mystery until recently when research has revealed that morning sickness is nothing more than Mother Nature's remedy to ensure the survival of life.

Professor Paul Sherman and Samuel Flaxman of the Neurology and Behaviour Department of Cornell University, USA, conducted studies involving 80,000 pregnant women from 16 countries - 68 per cent of whom had experienced morning sickness. The results of their research led them to conclude that morning sickness is an inappropriate name for a condition which could more accurately be defined as 'wellness insurance'.

The symptoms of nausea and vomiting that are most pronounced six to eight weeks after conception are, Sherman and Flaxman insist, the body's mechanism for rejecting foods that contain toxins, micro-organisms, or chemicals that are detrimental to the health of both mother and foetus.

Foods derived from animals (meat, fish, poultry, and eggs) may, if inadequately handled and prepared, contain parasites and harmful pathogens. Some plant foods contain chemicals that protect plants against attacks by insects and diseases, and although these normally have no detrimental effect on humans, their ingestion during pregnancy, when a woman's immune system is at a lower than normal level, could adversely affect the foetus during the early stages of its development. Morning sickness is Mother Nature's way to eliminate these potentially harmful foods, and women who suffered morning sickness were significantly less likely to miscarry than those who did not.

Additional studies revealed that up to 80 percent of pregnant women developed aversions to foods, such as meat, fish, poultry, and eggs, in the first weeks of their pregnancy. Substantial numbers developed aversions to non-alcoholic beverages, including coffee and tea, while others had a pronounced dislike of vegetables, alcohol, and spicy foods. Many highly flavoured spices have anti-microbial properties that limit food borne illnesses and food poisoning, but the ingestion of excessive amounts of these spices can have harmful effects, as can large quantities of caffeine. Food cravings are also common during pregnancy, with research showing 67 percent of women developed a craving for specific foods, most commonly fruit and juices, sweets, desserts, and chocolate. Cravings and aversions are simply Mother Nature's way of letting a pregnant woman know what is good or bad for her changing body.

Researchers also analysed data relating to pregnant women in 27 traditional societies, and discovered that in societies where animal products played a minor role in a diet rich in plant foods such as corn and green vegetables, the symptoms of morning sickness were virtually unknown.

Women experiencing severe symptoms should seek medical advice, but Flaxman and Sherman warned, in their report, that treatment to alleviate low level symptoms might actually be detrimental to the unborn child if it hindered the expulsion of potentially harmful foods, or limited the process of learning to avoid them.

The symptoms of morning sickness may be unpleasant, but this temporary ailment is a natural and beneficial adaptation to changes occurring within the body, and pregnant women should listen to their bodies' demands, for Mother Nature, as always, know best.

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