

## 72 percent of pregnant women experience constipation and other bowel problems

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Nearly three out of four pregnant women experience constipation, diarrhea or other bowel disorders during their pregnancies, a Loyola University Medical Center study has found.

But such bowel disorders have only minimal impacts on pregnant women's quality of life, the study found.

The study by senior author Scott Graziano, MD and Payton Johnson was presented during the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists 61st Annual Clinical Meeting in New Orleans.

One hundred and four pregnant women were enrolled and completed the first trimester questionnaire; 66 women also completed a survey in the third trimester. Seventy-two percent of the [first trimester](#) respondents and 61 percent of the [third trimester](#) respondents reported one or more [bowel disorders](#), including constipation, diarrhea, bloating and [irritable bowel syndrome](#).

The women also filled out a questionnaire that measures the extent to which bowel problems affect quality of life. (For example, the survey asks whether bowel problems make life less enjoyable, limit what a person can wear or eat or make a person feel embarrassed, vulnerable, angry, isolated or depressed.)

The quality of life survey is scored on a 1 to 100 scale, with 100 representing the least possible impact on quality of life due to bowel

problems. The average score was 94.9. The only bowel problems that had a significant impact on quality of life were constipation (which reduced the score by 4.4 points out of 100) and bloating (which reduced the score by 4.0 points).

Graziano said the reason bowel problems have a minimal impact on quality of life is likely because pregnant women have learned to expect such problems during pregnancy, so are better able to tolerate them.

Bowel problems are due to physiological and [hormonal changes](#) that occur during pregnancy. For example, increased progesterone levels affect the [smooth muscles](#) in the [intestines](#). Consequently, it takes longer for food to move through the intestines, which can cause constipation. Vitamins and calcium and iron supplements that women take during pregnancy also can cause constipation, Graziano said.

Graziano recommends pregnant women get adequate fluid intake and plenty of fiber. The Loyola study found that pregnant women consume only 16 to 17 grams of fiber per day, while the recommended level for pregnant women and other adults is 25 to 30 grams per day.

If needed, stool softeners and suppositories are safe for pregnant women, Graziano said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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