

Expectant mothers may expect eye problems

Any pregnancy plan should include: OB-GYN, diapers, crib, pickles with ice cream — and an ophthalmologist (eye M.D.)

Expectant mothers have about a 50-50 chance of experiencing vision changes. Changes tend to be temporary, but some could be acute and serious. Certain symptoms may signal eye problems that can be lasting or permanently damage vision, although most can be treated successfully.

If expectant mothers notice any changes in vision — beyond slight occasional blurriness — they should visit an ophthalmologist for a diagnosis. Some of the most common eye problems that may flare up during pregnancy are dry eye syndrome, increased near-sightedness and/or intolerance to contact lenses, said ophthalmologist Rainna Bahadur, M.D., a partner at Eye Associates of the South. (But pregnant women should report even slight blurriness to their OB-GYN, even if an eye appointment isn't needed, she added.)

"Ophthalmologists essentially diagnose and treat pregnant mothers no differently than any other female patients, but are more aware of their potential issues," Bahadur explained.

Such pregnancy conditions as changes in hormone levels, changes in immune system functioning, fluid retention, swelling, increased blood pressure and/or higher glucose levels can trigger or enhance eye problems.

Many visual disturbances resolve within six weeks postpartum. Fewer eye problems linger through the breastfeeding period, which usually is from six months to two years, added ophthalmologist Debra LaPrad,

M.D. She and Bahadur are partners at Eye Associates of the South.

The practice has clinics with optical shops in Biloxi, Ocean Springs and Gulfport.

Pregnant and new mothers should report any the following eye symptoms to their ophthalmologist.

- significant blurry vision
- dry eyes, sticky eyes, excess tearing, gritty eyes
- eye pain
- spots or dark areas in visual field
- flashes of light
- eye infections, inflammation, itching or pink eye
- double vision
- significant swelling around the eyes
- sensitivity to light (headaches) or unexplained headaches
- sudden increase in floaters
- sty, chalazion, lump or sore on eyelid
- hemangiomas (benign red tumors)
- dulling of color vision
- eye neural issues
- visual disturbances with headaches & nausea
- loss of peripheral or central vision
- total loss of vision

Starting with the smaller problems, blurry vision during pregnancy can be remedied if it interferes with daily activities or driving, with a temporary prescription for inexpensive eyeglasses or disposable contacts.

(LASIK isn't an option during this period since new mother's vision could fluctuate until breastfeeding ends.)

Dry eye syndrome can be persistent. Since some over-the-counter (OTC) eye drops have not been tested for pregnant women, be sure your doctor approves them. Some OTC drops even exacerbate such problems, said Bahadur, a dry eye specialist. Eye Associates of the South was designated by Allergan as "The Dry Eye Treatment Center for the Mississippi Gulf Coast."

Other, sometimes serious, eye conditions that may surface during pregnancy range from disease complications to eye tumors to vascular issues/internal bleeding. In many cases, both your OB-GYN and ophthalmologist would be involved in treatment.

"Expectant mothers who have diabetes or have pre-eclampsia complications during pregnancy are of special concern to eye doctors," LaPrad said.



Pre-eclampsia is characterized by high blood pressure and signs of organ damage (usually kidneys or liver), which occurs in about four percent of pregnant women. Pre-eclampsia can cause serious problems in the eye's retina, including retinal detachment, which is an emergency, she said. Certain eye tumors, papilledema, optic neuritis and uveitis also could cause urgent visual concern for pregnant women, the doctors said.

Various types of diabetes in pregnant women often cause visual complications and possible damage to the retina, Bahadur said.

Gestational diabetes first develops in about two percent of women during pregnancy. It occurs if the body produces insufficient insulin to meet the extra needs of pregnancy. In almost all gestational diabetes cases, blood sugar levels return to normal after childbirth. But some of those women may develop type 2 diabetes later in life, she explained.

According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO), pregnant women who already have

type 1 or type 2 diabetes should re-

ceive a comprehensive eye examination before conception, again early in the first trimester of pregnancy and thereafter about every three months, depending on their retinopathy (retinal damage/vision loss).

Women with diabetes are susceptible to rapid progression of diabetic retinopathy during pregnancy — including blurred vision, significant vision loss and even permanent blindness, LaPrad explained.

All pregnant women who are about age 40 should have an eye exam before or early in their pregnancy. (The AAO recommends all adults receive a baseline eye exam from an ophthalmologist by age 40.)

The AAO also recommends eye screening for newborns and another eye exam for infants as early as six months old. Certain infectious, congenital, and hereditary eye diseases may be manifest at birth, and create a risk to vision if undetected.

Finally, pregnant women may experience some cosmetic problems, such as darkening or sagging eyelids or pigment changes around eyes and cheeks, which typically disappears after pregnancy, the doctors said.

For an appointment, call Eye Associates of the South at (228) 396-5185 or visit their website at www.2020view.com.