The last few months of pregnancy, called the third trimester, can be physically and emotionally challenging. Many expectant parents find that the third trimester offers special joys and concerns.

**The Good News.**

During the seventh and eighth months, the pregnancy has become very real to all involved. Mom’s figure has blossomed and the fetal movements have become more pronounced. In spite of the extra girth, you feel a real connection and amazement as the baby continues to grow.

In the third trimester, you will continue to meet with your healthcare provider regularly. By the end of the 37th week, your baby is considered full term. Your prenatal visits will include being examined for fetal position, cervical changes, as well as the normal assessments of weight, urine, blood pressure and fetal heart rate. Use these visits to ask questions about what to expect during this stage. This will help you prepare for these final weeks of pregnancy.

**Special Deliveries Happen Every Day**

It’s more than just a slogan. You do have special options at The Family Care Birthing Center Memorial. Our birthing suites have been designed so that modern medical technology blends well with comfort, safety, and an attractive home-like environment. When you come here for delivery, you can expect the best!

For more than 50 years, Memorial’s approach to maternity care has made us one of this area’s leading maternity service providers. You, your baby and your family members are very important to us, and The Family Care Birthing Center is proud to be an integral part of over 1,500 births annually.
A Happy Birth Day

Planning for the actual birth of your baby has been going on for weeks. During the third trimester, your doctor visits give you more opportunities to discuss your plans and ask questions. The doctor sees you more often to help pick up on changes that may affect you or the baby at delivery. You should also bring up your goals for your postpartum experience. You'll feel your best if you keep up the good work for getting proper food, rest, and exercise for this time of pregnancy. As you enter the last weeks of your pregnancy, try to finalize all the details that you can concerning your birth plan. If you have not heard from the Special Delivery Nurse for a pre-admission appointment to answer medical history questions and discuss your birth plan, leave a message at 618-257-6800, Extension 5853.

• Pre-register at the hospital. This process involves your billing and insurance information. You will need to bring a photo ID, current insurance card and you will be signing consents to treat you and the baby. This process takes place in the Admission & Testing Center in Medical Office Center – One on Memorial’s campus. Use Entrance A near the Emergency Room. Remember to:

• Plan for the care of other children, even if labor starts at 2 a.m.
• Have your supplies for labor ready and practice using them.
• Participate in the classes at The Family Care Birthing Center for expectant families – it’s fun and everyone can learn something new!
• In the last month, pack a suitcase for the hospital. You will need a bra (nursing bra if you are breast feeding), clothes for sleeping and for discharge, personal grooming items, and an outfit for your baby’s picture and for discharge. Don’t forget the infant car seat!

Admission Through Discharge: We’re Here For You!

Entering The Family Care Birthing Center’s doors may mean you are entering a whole new phase in your life. Delivering a baby with family-centered care is just the start of it! Our labor and delivery nurses know that it is important for you to have a support system and what seems ordinary to them, may be an extraordinary day for you! Ask them if options like using a birthing ball, or warm shower for comfort, or a squat bar for pushing are right for you. Your designated support system may be present as long as you need them, unless there are medical indications.

Choose a labor support team (up to three people) who will be available and helpful to you. Most often, the labor coach is the baby’s father or a relative or close friend who is interested and caring. Your labor coach should be someone who encourages you if labor is difficult, and celebrates with you on a job well done - your baby’s birth!

Childbirth Education Classes help you learn to work together effectively in labor. Practice is important so that when real labor begins you will know just how to use them for your best comfort. To schedule or inquire about our classes, call 618-257-4826 or visit www.mems hosp.com and click on The Family Care Birthing Center page.

The coach who keeps looking for little ways to add to your labor progress and comfort should be the most important person on your team! A few things a coach might do:

• Keep you focused on special breathing techniques.
• Assist you with positioning for comfort and labor progress.
• Massage hands, feet, back or areas that feel good to you.
• Encourage you with smiles and hugs.
• Suggest relaxation techniques and coach you through contractions.
• Make phone calls and take pictures.

Once your baby is here, our goal is not to separate you and your baby unless medically indicated. The nurses will assist you with bonding, feeding and baby care, as well as your own healthcare needs and recovery.

The Family Care Birthing Center at Memorial provides help with your needs for rest, nutrition, bonding time and information so that you will feel prepared to take your baby home. Memorial’s nurses continue the caring touch with follow-up phone calls to answer your questions once you are home. Or, you can call in anytime 618-257-5855 to speak with a nurse about your concerns.

Real Labor and False Starts

How to tell whether or not you are in real labor can be a concern for many parents-to-be. Many women notice uterine contractions early in the pregnancy. Others may keep waiting for signs of labor right up until the due date. Sometimes those early contractions of pregnancy, known as Braxton Hicks contractions, become so strong that a “false labor” episode occurs. The following tips may help identify whether or not true labor is starting:

• True labor contractions usually become stronger, more regular, and more frequent over a few hours.
• Regular contractions that are five minutes apart or less, lasting about a minute for at least an hour may be early labor. If you can no longer walk or talk through a contraction or focus on a diversion, you may want to go to the hospital.
• Activity, like walking, increases true labor contractions.
• Emptying your bladder, lying on your left side and drinking two glasses of water within an hour may diminish false labor contractions.
• True labor contractions may be felt in the low back, often wrapping around to the lower abdomen.
• False labor contractions are often irregular abdominal cramps.
• The bag of water may break with a “gush” of fluid or a trickle that causes a feeling of constant wetness in your panties. Put a sanitary pad in your panties and walk around for a short time. If the pad continues to get wet, come to the hospital regardless of contractions.
• Sometimes mothers notice a heavier mucous vaginal discharge a few weeks or days before their due date. This could be the mucous plug releasing from the cervix. It may be blood-tinted after a vaginal exam at the doctor’s office or if accompanied by regular contractions, which could be bloody too. You should never experience bright red bleeding (like your period). This is not normal, and you should come to the hospital.

If you are uncomfortable, call your doctor or come to the Family Care Birthing Center to be evaluated. Even if you are admitted, you must often wait for Mother Nature to see if the contractions progress to the real thing. Be patient! And don’t worry if you have a false start or two as you get closer to your due date. Think of it as a chance to practice for the real “Birth Day.”

Breastfeeding Support Services

Breastfeeding is considered the very best option for babies and mothers. Breastfeeding has many advantages:

• Antibodies from the mother can help fight off early disease or allergies in infants.
• Breast milk is a perfect food and is easily digested.
• Breast milk has a laxative effect to help your baby pass those first thick stools, known as meconium.
• Breast milk is produced at a perfect temperature and is convenient.
• No bottle preparation is necessary.
• Breastfeeding is less expensive than buying formula.
• Breastfeeding encourages mother-infant bonding.
• By breastfeeding, mom gets back in shape quicker by using 500 calories per day to produce milk.

What many expectant parents may not know is that The Family Care Birthing Center at Memorial offers assistance with breastfeeding through our Lactation Consultant Program. Besides getting off to a good start, the consultant can offer help if you experience any problems or have questions once you get home. Just call 618-257-5875 or 618-257-6067 and leave a message.
What's Going On?  
A Peek Inside!

The end of your pregnancy is near!  By now, you may be tired of being pregnant and eager to meet your baby face to face.  But your uterus is still a busy place.  Fetal development continues during the third trimester.  Your baby will open his or her eyes and by 33 weeks they can detect light.  Sexual development continues and the puffy white protective coating to the skin has become thicker.  Rapid weight gain starts by 36 weeks. You will definitely be aware of the baby stretching, moving, even hiccupping!

Jump Starts:  
Inducing Labor

Sometimes pregnancy goes past 40 weeks and that's okay. Sometimes, though, factors during the pregnancy make it necessary to deliver the baby before the mother goes into labor on her own.  If she has diabetes with pregnancy, pregnancy-induced hypertension (high blood pressure), a very large baby, lives a long distance from the hospital (especially with a history of a previous rapid labor) or has significant cervical dilation prior to labor then pregnancy may be induced.  If your bag of water has broken and you have not begun regular, effective contractions, the doctor may suggest stimulating your labor.

If induction of labor is indicated during the last few weeks of pregnancy, your doctor or health-care provider will discuss it with you during a prenatal visit.  The method of induction would be determined by your cervical exam and health history.  There are several methods used to ripen (soften and thin the cervix), and others to help dilate your cervix. Contractions may be stimulated with medication.  Pros and cons exist concerning induction and certain methods may affect your birth plan options.  Ask your healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about induction of labor.

Testing... 7, 8, 9

Fetal Fibronectin test
If you are at high risk or are experiencing symptoms of preterm labor before 36 weeks, the fetal fibronectin test can be used to rule out preterm labor.  Fetal fibronectin is a protein that acts as "glue" during pregnancy, attaching the amniotic fluid sac to the lining of the uterus.  This is often present in the cervical secretions during early pregnancy.  If your healthcare provider is concerned about preterm canal, he or she may swab the cervical canal for the presence of fetal fibronectin. If the test is positive, they may take steps to address premature birth.  Medications may be given to enhance the baby’s lung maturity.

Group B Strep Culture
During the third trimester, you will screen for Group B Streptococcus (GBS) which is a common bacteria that is usually harmless in adults.  However, babies who become infected with GBS can become seriously ill.  Your healthcare provider will use a sterile swab in the vagina and rectal area to test for GBS.  If you test positive for GBS, you will be given antibiotics during labor to protect your baby at delivery.

Cesarean Section
When a delivery must be a cesarean, they will also schedule a date for a visit with our Special Delivery Nurse. She will ask pertinent questions about your pregnancy, personal and family medical history.  An explanation of the surgery preparation, birth and recovery process will be given.  Blood work may be done that day as well as a visit from the anesthesia department.  You will also have the opportunity to make choices for you and your baby’s care.  Questions are always welcome.  If you need to contact the Special Delivery Nurse, please leave a message at 618-257-6800, Extension 5853.

Exercises for Labor and Birth

Kegel Exercises - Tone pelvic floor muscles by starting and stopping the flow of urine. These muscles need help to prepare for delivery.

Tailor Sit - Sitting “tailor” or “Indian-style” several times a day will stretch your pelvic and thigh muscles, keep pelvic joints flexible and increase blood flow to the lower body.

Low Back Stretch and Pelvic Tilt - Get down on your hands and knees and round your back up towards the ceiling.  Hold this position and then relax to flatten your back.  Repeat each exercise several times, as long as it’s comfortable.

Normal Discomforts

During the last two months, some discomforts may arise that usually are perfectly normal for this time of pregnancy.
- Most women experience some shortness of breath, while others find that pressure on the bladder from an enlarging uterus is a greater problem.
- Nature seems to slow some women down. Naps and resting during the day are a good idea.  Lying down can alleviate the swelling of feet and ankles that some women experience.

Another common theme during the third trimester is concern about life changes after the baby comes.
- Some women need more pain relief than others.  Medications and pain relievers (such as narcotics) may be helpful to relieve labor sensations. Epidurals are a form of regional anesthesia that may also be an option.  Since any drug or anesthesia can have side effects, they should be used wisely and only when the benefits outweigh any risks.

Discuss the timing and route of administration with your doctor.  Some good advice is to wait and see how you are feeling in labor before making up your mind about using medication or an epidural.  You, your coach, the doctor and nurses should all work toward a safe and satisfying birth.

For more Information about Childbirth Education classes, visit the Family Care Birthing Center page at www.memhosp.com.