

Update 1

What are Symptoms? The Case of Morning Sickness.

Nausea and vomiting in early pregnancy, together known as morning sickness, affect as many as 70% of pregnant women but little is known about the cause and role of these common and often incapacitating bodily responses.

Within the medical community it is common for morning sickness to be thought of as a symptom of pregnancy, almost as if pregnancy were a disease. The logic, in dealing with this 'symptom' seems to have been: morning sickness makes women uncomfortable, so let's alleviate the symptom, usually with medication, and thereby relieve them of their discomfort.

However, before attempting to mask this symptom, let's ask the question, "In generating morning sickness, is the body, doing exactly what is best for the fetus and/or mother to be?"

Recent research gives considerable support to a theory, initially developed by a Biologist called Margie Profet, which speaks highly of the body's inborn wisdom. Profet developed her theory based on some of the following research findings:

- *A number of studies have now shown that women with morning sickness are less likely to suffer miscarriages or have premature or low birth weight babies. (9 out of 9 studies).*
- *Women who vomit suffer fewer miscarriages than those who experience nausea alone.*
- *Women with no morning sickness symptoms have higher rates of miscarriage and underweight babies.*
- *There is a close correlation between the time when the fetal liver is least able to detoxify many chemical compounds and when a pregnant woman experiences morning sickness.*
- *There is a correlation between toxin concentrations and the tastes and odors that cause pregnant women to be nauseous.*

Based on the above findings, Profet asked, "Could it be that morning sickness is an example of the body's inborn wisdom expressing health exactly as it is designed to?"

Profet hypothesised that nausea and food aversions early in pregnancy serve as important protective mechanisms for the developing fetus. She argued that morning sickness has evolved to impose dietary restrictions on the mother and thereby minimise fetal exposure to toxins while the developing liver is unable to detoxify certain chemicals found in common foods. If Profet's hypothesis proved to be right it certainly would not make sense to interfere with the 'symptom' of morning sickness.

Although the theory has undergone a number of revisions it certainly now seems that morning sickness, which might be better thought of as 'morning wellness', is very important for fetal well being. A recent review concluded that, "Available data are most consistent with the idea that morning sickness serves an important function".

Without a doubt, the body's inborn wisdom knows best. In the case of so called 'morning sickness' what appeared, from a limited 'pain relief' perspective, to be an uncomfortable bodily malfunction, is instead proving to be a vital life preserving function. Two authors, in reviewing the work of Profet, concluded, "pregnant women should be extremely wary of ALL DRUGS, both therapeutic and recreational. Certainly, it would be wise to avoid taking any medication."

Other than avoiding drugs, what should a pregnant mother do about her nausea?

In short, respect it because it is a healthy response. This intelligent response to certain foods is an adaptive process, born from within, that increases the likely-hood of health for the next generation. I think it was Lewis Thomas who said, "A kind of super intelligence exists in each of us, infinitely smarter and possessed of technical know-how far beyond our present understanding."

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