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# How to get through a summer pregnancy

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By Caroline Berdon

AAP  DECEMBER 14, 2011 1:17PM

WHEN I announced to friends and family that I was pregnant with my first child, due in January, I received as many comments of commiserations as congratulations.

"Oh, you poor thing, it'll be so hot!" some said. "Slap bang in the heat of the Aussie summer - great timing!" said others.

When I then announced three years later that my second child, currently still in utero, is also due in January, well-wishers asked time and time again why I hadn't learned from the first time.

There are myriad myths and old wives' tales surrounding pregnancy, but the one about pregnant women feeling the heat more than everyone else is not one of them; it's as real as a baby's cry.

When you are pregnant your body temperature is already a few degrees higher than normal. But added to that, you have around 50 per cent more blood circulating around your system, which means blood vessels and veins open up. Pores also sweat more as a way to reduce the body temperature.

Leg swelling - or physiologic edema - during the second half of pregnancy is also more likely to happen during the summer months.

"Very few women love being heavily pregnant in the depths of summer," says Sydney-based Hannah Dahlen, who has been a midwife for over 20 years.

"There's definitely a general increase in feeling warm when you're pregnant. The hormones in pregnancy can also make women have that kind of glow, particularly around the blood supply to the cheeks and face."

Both my pregnancies have been challenging at times in the heat - the first one when I was working full-time as a busy news reporter, often out and about attending outdoor news events; my second one when I am chasing after my energetic two-and-a-half-year-old. On many occasions I have winced at the cliched image of myself sitting inelegantly in the shade, lightly panting and fanning my face.

But, having said that, I also think mid-summer is a lovely time to see out a pregnancy and bring new life into the world.

For starters, the warmer weather allows for many blissful hours spent in the pool or bobbing in the ocean. Many heavily pregnant women describe being emerged in water as the only time they feel truly weightless because the weight is taken off the sciatic nerve, which runs down the lower back and into the legs.

You can also save on maternity clothes. Having two summer babies, my own maternity wardrobe remains quite scant, with just one pair of maternity jeans, one pair of maternity tailored work trousers, a handful of maternity tops, and then a pleasant array of leggings and loose-fitting summer tops and dresses that I wore pre-pregnancy.

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But those thoughts alone won't get you through the hot and difficult weeks of late pregnancy.

Dahlen advises women to try and avoid going out in the hottest hours of the day, keep themselves hydrated, wear loose-fitting clothing that allows their skin to breathe, and take a dip in the pool or the sea as often as time allows.

For those with other children to look after, she recommends taking up offers of help from friends and family that will allow you to put your feet up and rest, particularly during the warmest hours of the day.

But even if this is not always possible, it's reassuring to know that the heat and discomfort felt by the mother is in no way harmful to the fetus - unless the mother develops a fever, in which case she should consult her caregiver immediately.

Despite the challenges of heavy pregnancy in mid-summer, Dahlen urges couples not to consciously try and avoid this eventuality when they are trying to conceive.

"Seventy per cent of pregnancies are unplanned. There are disadvantages in planning pregnancy too much for the optimal mums because then you end up with massively busy maternity units, as we do in September anyway (following the pregnancy boom over the Christmas and New Year period) and you end up with not having enough care. So there's no good enough reason to avoid being pregnant in the summer months."

It may also help to remember that two thirds of the world's population live in the tropics, and that most mothers and babies cope just fine under extreme heat - and nature ensures it's that way.

"Really we have to see pregnancy and birth as a very normal part of life and not get so concerned about all these issues that aren't actually concerns," Dahlen says.

"At the end of the day babies and mothers are strong and they've been doing this for millions of years and they will continue. Just make yourself comfortable, listen to your body and enjoy it."

### **BEAT THE HEAT - TIPS TO COPE IN PREGNANCY**

- Avoid going out in the heat of the day; go for a cooling walk in the early morning or early evening.
- Keep an eye on the weather forecast for heat alerts, and plan to stay indoors or go somewhere air conditioned.
- Keep a cool flannel to hand to dab your face and neck.
- Drink lots of fluids to stay hydrated. Water is good, but so are orange juice, milk and sports drinks, which replace electrolytes that are sweated away.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing in breathable materials such as cotton and linen, and stay away from synthetics. This will keep you cooler and also help to prevent heat rash under your breasts and belly, a common problem for pregnant women.
- If you have other children to take care of, accept offers of help so you can rest, put your feet up and keep cool.
- Hit the pool or the beach; swimming can do wonders for cooling you down, keeping you in (relative) shape and - if your baby is presenting posterior in later weeks (when his or her spine is facing your spine) - encouraging him or her into a