



## Pica During Pregnancy

Pica is the practice of craving substances with little or no nutritional value. Most pica cravings involve non-food substances, such as dirt or chalk. The word pica is Latin for magpie, which is a bird notorious for eating almost anything.

It is true the majority of women will experience cravings during pregnancy. However, most of these cravings are for things like pickles and ice cream. Pica cravings are most commonly seen in children and occur in approximately 25-30% of all children; pica cravings in pregnant women are even less common.

### What causes pica during pregnancy?

The reason some women develop pica cravings during pregnancy is not known for certain. There is currently no known cause. However, according to the Journal of American Dietetic Association, there may be a connection to an iron deficiency.

Some speculate pica cravings are the body's attempt to obtain vitamins or minerals which are missing through normal food consumption.

### What are typical pica cravings during pregnancy?

The most common substances craved during pregnancy are dirt, clay and laundry starch. Other pica cravings include burnt matches, stones, charcoal, mothballs, cornstarch, toothpaste, soap, sand, plaster, coffee grounds, baking soda and cigarette ashes.

### Are pica cravings harmful to the baby?

Eating non-food substances may interfere with the nutrient absorption of healthy food substances and actually cause a deficiency. Pica cravings are also a concern because non-food items may contain toxic or parasitic ingredients.

### What can you do if you have pica cravings?

Don't panic; it happens! The most important thing is to inform your health care provider and make sure you have a complete understanding of the specific risks associated with your cravings. Here are some suggestions to help you deal with pica cravings:

- Inform your health care provider
- Monitor your iron status
- Consider potential substitutes for the cravings, such as chewing sugarless gum
- Inform a friend of your craving, so they can help you avoid non-food items



For more information, visit  
[AmericanPregnancy.org](http://AmericanPregnancy.org)