FMSW: What to take for Common Complaints in Pregnancy

What we know about the safety of medications and herbal supplements in pregnancy can change over the years, as more is learned, so that even some of the things that we think are safe later turn out to cause problems. The best policy is to take the fewest number of things and the lowest doses that are possible. This is particularly true in the first three months of pregnancy (first trimester), when the risks of birth defects are the highest. Still, being pregnant does not stop women from having other problems, and here are some suggestions for managing symptoms safely:

**Allergies/Hayfever:**
1. Salt water in the nose (1/2 tsp salt in 2/3 C water with a pinch of baking soda, 1 dropperful in each nostril three times a day)
2. Nasalcrone - 1 spray each nostril 3-4 times a day (this can take a couple days to work, and a week to see its full effect.)
3. Antihistamines: Claritin (loratidine) 10 mg per day or zyrtec 10 mg per day orally
4. Decongestants: may be used after first trimester, but with caution, since they constrict blood vessels. Nasal sprays such as afrin can be used after first trimester for 1-2 days at a time only (since they are very habit-forming if used longer), and Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) can be taken orally 30 – 60 mg every 6-8 hours if you are desperate or waiting for other things to work.

**Nausea/Vomiting:**
Eat small frequent meals (try even snacking before you get out of bed in the morning), try eating foods chilled, stay away from cooking odors, and so on. If you are still very nauseated, try:
1. Vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine) 100 mg per day, and add Unisom 10 mg every 6 hours if not working
2. Ginger 500 mg 4x per day
3. Consider Emetrol syrup, 1-2 tablespoons every 15 minutes for up to 5 doses, with no or minimal other fluids.
If you are vomiting and getting dehydrated (feeling dizzy or lightheaded, peeing very little), please call or come in – you may need medical treatment.

**Heartburn:**
Eat small, frequent meals and avoid drinking a lot of fluids with meals or eating within 2 hours of lying down. Some people find taking papaya enzymes with meals decreases their heartburn. If not:
1. Calcium carbonate (Tums) 500 mg as needed, up to 4 per day
2. Ranitidine (Zantac) 150 mg twice a day

**Constipation:**
Eat lots of fruits and veggies and drink plenty of water. Going for regular walks also helps.
1. Fiber supplements such as psyllium (Metamucil) or Benefiber can help
2. Stool softeners (such as docusate 100 mg twice a day)
3. Magnesium oxide – start with 2 pills a day and gradually increase until your bowels are moving easily, cut back if you develop diarrhea.

**Diarrhea:**
Drink plenty of salty fluids, limit dairy products, and see a doctor if you are having fever or blood in your stool. If not, try a fiber supplement like psyllium, which will often bind together loose stools. Other things you can use:
1. Kapectate – 1-2 tabs every 1/2 - 1 hour, up to maximum 8 doses per day
2. Loperamide (Imodium) 2 mg, 1-2 tabs to start and then one every couple hours as needed, up to a maximum of 8 pills/day. AVOID Pepto-Bismol.

**Pain:**
Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is considered safe in pregnancy.
DO NOT take aspirin, ibuprofen (motrin), naprosyn (aleve, nuprin) or other anti-inflammatory medications.

**Headaches:**
See pain relievers as above. To prevent headaches in early pregnancy:
1. Drink plenty of fluids and take in extra salt. One helpful remedy is to drink a cup of soup morning and night.
2. Take magnesium citrate, or magnesium lactate, glycinate or other forms (but NOT magnesium oxide) regularly – gradually increase the dose to as much as you can tolerate without diarrhea.