



BUMP

ENVY

However you're rocking up front (or to the side...) it's hard to avoid comparing your preggie belly against others. But, all competition aside, you might be surprised to discover why yours is unique

Whether you're in the doctor's waiting room or walking down the street, playing 'compare the bump' is kind of inevitable. Okay, so it's not exactly spoken out loud but chances are that checking out how other pregnant bellies measure up has become an almost automatic pastime. How come hers is bigger/smaller/higher/lower/rounder?

Everyone from colleagues to the odd stranger seems to have an opinion on how your tummy is looking. Just ask US model Sarah Stage, who posted her pregnancy

pics on Instagram earlier this year and was hit with criticism for her small stomach. She went on to give birth to a perfectly healthy (and normal-sized) baby.

Because here's the thing: every woman is unique and there are umpteen factors that influence your bump's size and shape.

Obstetrician Dr Peter Jurcevic from The Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne says your womb is made up of more than just your baby. "There's amniotic fluid, your placenta, the muscular wall of your uterus, as well as your abdomen," he says.



You could line up 10 women who are in the same week of pregnancy and who will likely go on to deliver babies of the same size, says Peter, and yet each of their bumps could look totally different from the others.

So, whether you feel like you're carrying a melon, netball or squishy pillow, here's the low-down on what's going on in there and the game-changers that give your bump its own distinctive look and feel.

NUMBER OF BABIES

Women carrying multiples tend to have bigger bumps than those with just one on board, but if this isn't your first pregnancy, that will also affect size. Professor Michael Permezel, president of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, says bumps are often more prominent the second time around

because your abdominal muscles will be stretched from the first. "Your baby isn't held in your pelvis as deeply as someone with tighter, more compact muscles," he says. The deeper your bub, the less she will show. Oh, and that cute bump pop you woke up to one day? "The uterus sits in your pelvis in early pregnancy," Michael explains. "When it becomes too big at 12 and 16 weeks, it elevates – or 'pops' – up into your abdomen where it's then more visible."

SIZING YOU UP

A note of reassurance: your antenatal care team will keep an eye on how your bump is growing using a simple but accurate method called the fundal height measurement. This usually happens at each check-up from 14 weeks on.

Babies are measured from the top of the uterus (fundus) to the pubic bone, and the reading is compared to gestational age. So, if you're 28 weeks pregnant, your obstetrician would expect your fundal height to be around 28cm. "If there's a discrepancy of more than 2cm either side, there's the potential for a statistically 'small' or 'big' baby but, of course, this is monitored," says Peter. "I think that, instead of specific birth weights, it's better to talk about a range of growth and how you're tracking with that throughout pregnancy."

If there are any concerns, your doctor will typically organise an ultrasound scan to check that everything is okay. Michael says that many of us see our bumps very differently to how they actually measure up. And that's often a case of perspective – if you're short, your bump may appear to be bigger than it would on someone taller.

"Family history is interesting, but your child is a combination of both parents and there are always other factors to consider."

THE PUZZLE PIECES

How you're carrying under that new maternity top is influenced by your genetic make-up, and that of your partner. Birth weight usually runs in families, with the mother's side tending to dominate genetically until the birth. So, does that mean that if you were a small baby, yours will be too? Not necessarily.

"Family history is interesting, but your child is a combination of both parents and there are always other factors to consider," says Peter. "Conditions including gestational and pre-existing diabetes often lead to a larger baby, not to mention that diets and lifestyles have changed since your mum and grandma were pregnant."

Michael points out that maternal weight is also a factor and being overweight before pregnancy can make your baby bump look larger, whereas mamas-to-be with slimmer frames will often show less.

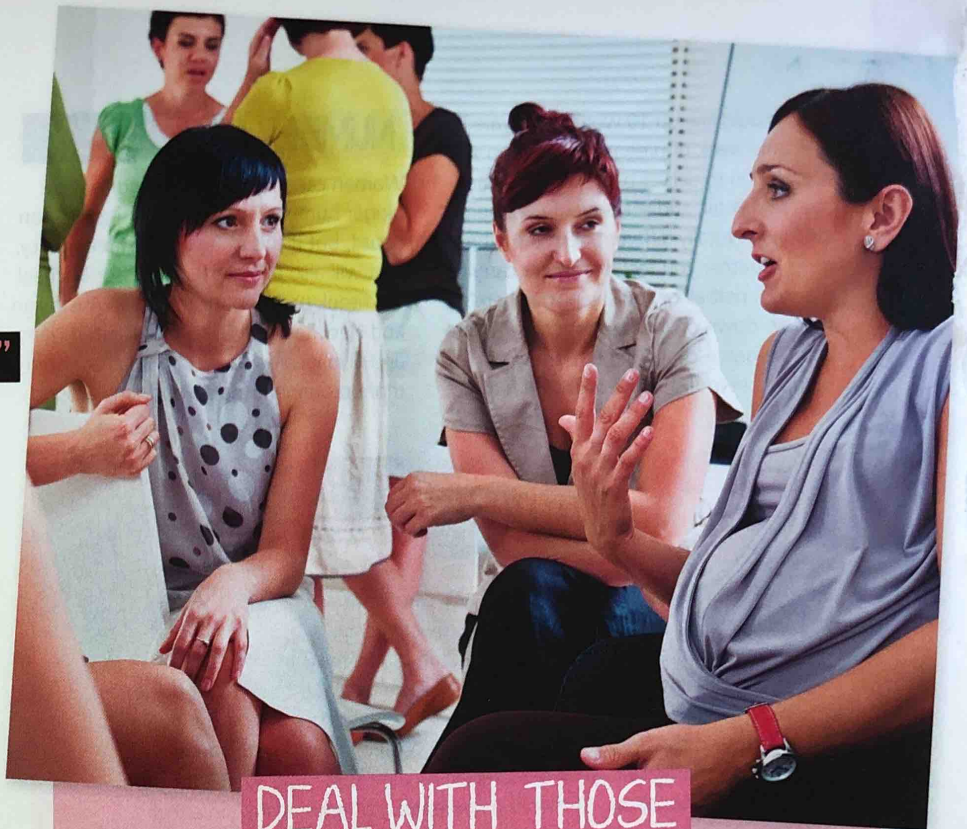
“Remind yourself that people usually have good intentions.”

“I CARRIED A WATERMELON”

Who doesn't love an old wives' tale for predicting your baby's sex? And there sure are plenty of bump-related ones. You're carrying low so you're expecting a boy. Or a watermelon shape equals a girl while a rounder 'basketball' means a son. There's even a theory about your linea nigra, the dark vertical line that can appear on your stomach. Apparently, if it runs past your bellybutton a boy is on the cards but if you don't have one or it doesn't extend that far, get ready for a daughter. Phew.

These predictions are fun (and there's always a 50/50 chance they'll get it right) but is there any science behind them? Well, no, says Peter. “These are purely anecdotal and the linea nigra develops because of increased production of the hormone melatonin,”

he says. Just try convincing your superstitious mother-in-law about that! ●



DEAL WITH THOSE

‘HUGE’ COMMENTS

JUST BEEN TOLD HOW BIG YOU'RE LOOKING BY THAT WOMAN IN MARKETING... FOR THE FOURTH TIME THIS WEEK? THESE STRATEGIES FROM PSYCHOLOGIST AND LIFE COACH ANITA ALEXANDER MAY COOL YOU OFF

DEFLECT IT

Humour, or a non-committal response followed by a subject change usually diverts a conversation. Remember, you have the power here and it's unlikely the person will bring the topic back up if you've moved on.

LEARN TO SELF-SOOTHE

Take a deep breath, notice your reaction (if you're constantly being told your pregnancy bump is tiny, does it make you worry about it?) and tell yourself what you would say to reassure a friend – that everyone is different and the experts say you're fine. You may have to repeat this mantra on a number of occasions to bring yourself back to your centre, but you'll find it becomes easier to calm yourself every time you do.

GET SOME PERSPECTIVE

Remind yourself that people usually have good intentions and these comments may simply be their attempt at making small talk.

