

pregnant bridesmaids

BY JOHANNAH HANEY

You're walking down the aisle. Cameras are snapping. Your feet (which you haven't seen in months) are in the same high heels you swore off months ago. Your arms are stretched out, holding a bouquet of flowers in front of your ever-expanding body. Is this all just a bad dream? Nope! You're a bridesmaid!

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I'm Pregnant and...

Some women wonder whether they should bow out of the wedding. That is a very personal decision, one you should discuss openly with the bride. If you are very uneasy, the two of you might consider finding another way for you to be involved in the wedding, such as reading a poem or greeting guests.

However, lots of women are bridesmaids during pregnancy, and there are several things you can do to make sure you look and feel fabulous in your elegant maternity eveningwear.

Choosing the Gown

One of the main concerns for pregnant bridesmaids is choosing the gown. If you

The fabric can be just as important as the cut, most importantly for your own comfort. Yu and Liss say the best fabrics are those with stretch. Look for stretch silk and satin, rayon georgette, crepe, organza, and burnout velvets.

Does That Come in a Size 30 Weeks?

Many bridesmaid gowns do not come in maternity sizes. Liss recommends using a belly pillow to try to estimate what size you will be at the wedding. According to Yu, a good guideline would be to order a gown two sizes larger than your pre-pregnancy size.

Another option is to order a maternity dress in the same color and fabric as the

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have the luxury of being part of the gown-selection process, thank your lucky stars. If the bride-to-be plans to choose the gowns herself, ask her to kindly consider the following tips.

The cut of the gown is one of the most important considerations. Chrissy Yu, co-owner of Cadeau Maternity in New York City, says "Empire waists and bias cuts are very forgiving." The A-line gown is another great style for pregnant women. Look for a waistline that hits above the natural waist.

Remember, there is more to your body than just your growing belly! Mona Astra Liss of Mothers Work, Inc. (A Pea in the Pod, Mimi Maternity and Motherhood Maternity) in Philadelphia, PA, offers suggestions for drawing the focus to your other gorgeous features. "Halter necklines are fabulous for showing off the shoulders and bringing the focus closer to the face," she notes. She also says fishtail skirts can add the illusion of length.

other attendants' gowns, but with a more pregnancy-friendly style. Try to roughly match the neckline and sleeve style. This option might be best if the bridesmaid gowns were chosen before you became pregnant, or if the gowns are strappy sheaths specifically designed for a size two!

Be kind to yourself (and your ankles) — see if you can get away with wearing flat shoes. In most cases, the only part of the shoe visible from under a long gown is the toe.

Time to Work Some Alteration Magic!

So maybe you're thinking, that's all fine, but the gown was chosen way before I knew I was going to be pregnant! Bobbi Dempsey of Drifton, PA had no idea she would be six months pregnant for her friend's wedding when the bride-to-be asked her to be the model while shopping for bridesmaid gowns. "I was the perfect

Cadeau Maternity fashions are available at Barneys New York, Moms the Word, Shop Girl, Shelly Belly, Pickles and Ice Cream, Veronique, 9 Months, My Little Kingdom, Gifted Baby, Belly, and online at www.cadeaumaternity.com.

size for trying on gowns, but in the end they fit everyone else better than me," she laughs.

Remember: it's easier to take a gown in than it is to let it out. Just in case, ask the salesperson about the possibility of ordering extra fabric. Or, ask the other bridesmaids to save material cut from their gowns during alterations.

Sherri Gordon of Pickerington, OH was so close to her due date when the wedding day arrived, she was not sure whether she would be a pregnant bridesmaid or a new mom! "I ordered the largest size gown they made, and extra material. If I had the baby before the wedding, I could just cut the gown down to fit. If I was still pregnant, I would use the extra material to make a maternity dress," she says. Her baby was born three weeks before the wedding, and she had the dress fitted just days before.

So, just when should you have your gown altered? According to Liss, the golden rule of maternity alterations is to "stay still! Wait as much as three weeks to the event to leave as much room as possible for unexpected gain." Ask for referrals and secure your fitting appointments well in advance.

At the Rehearsal

The wedding rehearsal is an important time for you to scope things out and prepare for the big day. Make sure to plan an escape route during the wedding rehearsal in case you become overly warm or fatigued during the actual ceremony. Survey the area and find a place in front where you can sit. Ask the bride if you can be placed at the far side of the line so you will have easier access to a seat.

Dempsey was a bridesmaid at a July wedding that lasted for ninety minutes. "I felt faint and was reaching for something to hold on to," she says. "I was two seconds from falling to the floor, but I made it through the whole thing."

Don't feel strange about quietly excusing yourself, especially if you begin to feel lightheaded or tired. There's no need to stand if you are very uncomfortable. Chances are, no one will notice if you take a seat. If they do notice, they will certainly understand. If guests ask about it later, tell them the romance of it all swept you right off your feet!

During the Ceremony

Stay as relaxed as you can throughout the ceremony. Try to remember to distribute your weight evenly, with your feet slightly apart. Don't lock your knees! It might help to rest the bouquet in the crook of your arm so you do not have to hold your arms tensely in front of you.

Make sure you are well hydrated before the wedding. Start early; you don't want to be caught running to the ladies' room during the vows! Be prepared with bottled water, healthful snacks, and anything else that has been of comfort to you throughout your pregnancy.

When picture time rolls around, you have two choices: proudly show off how fabulous you look in your empire waist, stretch silk gown... or hide behind the rest of the wedding party in the peach taffeta nightmare that you could not convince the bride to forego. But don't worry, no one really chooses those hideous gowns anymore... do they?

Here Comes the Bridesmaid!

The most important thing to remember as a bridesmaid mom-to-be is to have fun! Start planning as early as you can, and you will be confident and comfortable as you step down the aisle. The bride will be grateful for your extra effort, and you will look and feel more radiant than ever! ■

About the author: *Johannah Haney is a freelance writer in Columbus, OH. She is the author of six books and numerous articles.*

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