



Pregnancy and Stress

Whether your pregnancy was planned or unexpected, some stress is a normal part of the process. At times during your pregnancy, you may feel happy, sad or scared. While these feelings are normal, prolonged or excessive stress may not be good for you or your unborn child and can lead to problems.

Untreated prenatal stress is strongly linked to low birth weight and/or premature delivery. Negative responses to stress can include use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs—all of which can affect fetal development, delivery and parenting. But the good news is that stress is highly treatable.^{1,2,3}

What contributes to stress during pregnancy?

- changes in your body, relationships, career and finances
- unplanned life changes resulting from unplanned pregnancy
- uncertainty about the pregnancy and how it will change your daily life
- anxiety over becoming a parent
- your age
- financial stress, unemployment
- how and when to tell your family, friends and coworkers
- worry about how your other children will react
- lack of understanding from family and friends
- past bouts of depression
- physical stress, such as morning sickness, back pain, urinary tract infections, chronic illnesses
- life events, death of a family member or close friend, previous miscarriage, change of job or home.

What can I do to decrease my stress?

- Eat and sleep properly.
- Exercise regularly.
- Boost your support network.
- Allow yourself regular time for leisure.
- Set goals for yourself.
- Insist on help with regular chores.
- Don't combine too many activities.
- Avoid alcohol, drugs and nicotine.
- Learn how to say “no.”
- Look at the sources of your stress and see if you can reduce the associated stress.
- Try techniques to reduce your stress, such as massage, relaxation and keeping a journal.

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¹ Wadhwa, Culhane, Rauh, Barve, Hogan, Sandman, Hobel, Chiczc-De Met, Dunkel Schetter, Garite, Glynn *Paediatr. Perinat Epidemiol* 2001

² Dole, Herz-Picciotto, Siega-Riz, McMahan, and Buekens *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 2003

³ Rondo, Ferreira, Nogueira, Ribeiro, Lobert and Artes *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2003