



A Quick Guide to Depression & Stress in Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period

- *Untreated prenatal stress is highly correlated with low birth weight and/or premature delivery*
- *Prenatal stress is highly treatable*
- *Negative responses to stress include increased use of alcohol, smoking and drugs – all of which have a negative impact on fetal development, delivery and parenting.* ^{1,2,3}
- *Prenatal depression is one of the best predictors of postpartum depression.*

Psychological Issues During Pregnancy

Depression:

Prevalence: ^{5,6,7}

- 7.4% first trimester
- 12.8% second semester
- 12.0% third semester

Symptoms:

- Depressed mood, tearfulness, despondency
- Lack of pleasure/interest
- Sleep disturbance (insomnia or hypersomnia)*
- Weight loss, loss of appetite*
- Loss of energy*
- Psychomotor agitation or retardation*
- Mood instability/irritability; inability to cope
- Increased feelings of vulnerability
- Lack of confidence/overwhelmed
- Anxiety/nervousness
- Poor concentration/indecisiveness memory problems*
- Frequent thoughts of death/suicide

* Symptoms that are frequently considered normal sequelae of pregnancy

Stress:

- One of the most significant predictors of low-birth weight and premature delivery
- Also associated with increased incidence of complications and malformations
- Multiple stressors
 - Changes in body, relationships, career, financial status and responsibilities
 - Unplanned pregnancies
 - The level of commitment in the couple
 - Age of the woman
 - Ambivalence about the pregnancy
 - Issues of control
 - Socioeconomic factors, financial stress, unemployment
 - Issues of when to tell people at work/family
 - Concerns about other children
 - Lack of emotional support
 - Previous history of depression

- Physical stressors such as morning sickness, back pain, urinary tract infections, chronic illnesses
- Life events, bereavement, miscarriage, relocation

Psychological Issues - Postpartum

- **Postpartum Blues**
- **Postpartum Depression**
- **Postpartum Psychosis**

Why it's important to diagnose and treat: ^{8,9,10,11}

These conditions have detrimental effects on the newborn in terms of cognitive, emotional, social and behavioral development – both long and short term (including language skills and IQ)

- The baby's cognitive development is often impaired if the mother has difficulty staying actively engaged.
- Maternal suicide is higher in this group.
- Father's have an increased incidence of depression if the mother becomes depressed.
- There is an increased likelihood of using alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs as part of negative coping styles.
- Having a depressed parent can have a negative impact for children in the family.
- The child is at increased risk for depression later in life.
- The child is more likely to have difficulty forming relationships.
- The child is more likely to lack a sense of mastery.
- The child often exhibits difficulties managing emotions (anger, frustration, etc.).
- Chronic depression has the greatest negative impact.

Only 20 percent of women suffering from postpartum depression receive treatment. The rest are either undiagnosed, misdiagnosed or do not seek medical assistance. ⁴

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