



Positive Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing during Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a time of enormous change and can be a wonderful, special, unique time. However, for some women pregnancy can be a time when they may develop mental health or emotional difficulties or psychological distress.

Most women have good mental health during pregnancy but for some they may already have mental health difficulties when they get pregnant. Others worry about mental health difficulties they have had in the past. They fear relapsing during pregnancy or after childbirth. Some women experience mental health difficulties for the first time in pregnancy.

Unfortunately, pregnancy does not stop people from having mental health difficulties. Women who stop medication just because they get pregnant may have a risk of symptoms returning. Depression and anxiety are the most common mental health problems in pregnancy. These affect about 10 to 15 out of every 100 pregnant women.

Women also experience many other mental health problems during pregnancy, just like at other times.

How your mental health is affected during pregnancy depends on many things. These may range from:

- ✓ the type of mental health difficulties you have experienced
- ✓ whether you are on medication or engaged in counselling/therapy
- ✓ recent stressful events in your life (such as a death in the family or a relationship ending)
- ✓ How you feel about your pregnancy. You may or may not be happy about being pregnant. You may have upsetting memories about difficulties in your own childhood.

We all experience joy and happiness at some time in our life, but we also can experience stress, distress and illness. As we are all unique individuals, take a moment to think about your wellness.....

- Can you describe what it felt like?
- Can you picture what it looked like?
- What helped?
- Who supported you?

Consider this exercise as helping you prepare for becoming a parent.

Positive mental health and emotional wellbeing starts with our awareness of what we are like when well. Now, consider what it may be like when you are feeling down or sad. It is important to note that mental health is a continuum from wellness to illness and we all find ourselves at different points throughout our lives. So, what can we do during pregnancy and beyond to maintain wellness? Here are a few pointers.

Remember we cannot prepare for everything!

- Be aware of your expectations-of pregnancy, birth and beyond. Try not to expect too much.
- Talk to your partner or a support person about the difference a baby will bring to your life.



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- Accept-it's ok to talk and ask for help if you are feeling low, anxious, scared. You are not alone. Set up support systems with like minded people.
- Anxiety occurs in pregnancy- it is common, but if it is affecting your mood or the things you do, it's ok to tell someone. Help is available.
- Preparing to become a parent can be emotionally challenging. Talk to your partner or support person about how you may cope with the challenges.
- Think about your baby. What type of parent(s) would they like?
- Be careful of what you read.
- Birth - there is no right or wrong way. Events beyond your control can happen. It is important to speak to your midwife if you become apprehensive.
- Parenting is a process, a skill you learn. Parents do not instantly fall in love with their baby. It can take time and confidence to develop.
- Professionals, your family and your friends may give you lots of advice. It is important to find the balance of what works for you and your baby.
- It is ok to ask questions. If you are concerned or curious about anything ask your midwife, obstetrician, GP.
- Exercise is important and proven to reduce stress and improve wellbeing. Try getting fresh air. If you used to run marathons but struggle to get up the stairs-do not worry you will get there. You may need to start slowly and build yourself up.
- All parents feel overwhelmed at times. You may feel at breaking point. It is ok to put your baby in a safe place (cot, buggy), walk away and breathe. This may be a good time to phone a friend.
- If you experience reoccurring negative emotions towards yourself, your baby or your partner and find them distressing, it is important to seek help and speak to someone. Especially if these emotions persist.
- If you have a history of mental health difficulties it is important to make a plan that helps you recognise symptoms earlier. It may be important to seek help sooner.
- The four keys area's to wellness: Eat Healthy, Sleep, even rest when possible, take time to meet people and take time to do what you enjoy.



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Medication in Pregnancy and when Breastfeeding

We know making the decision to continue or stop taking medication when pregnant can be a difficult decision. Therefore it is best that the decision is made by you (and your partner or a support person) in consultation with a healthcare professional.

For some women because of the risk of worsening mental health, you may be advised to continue taking medication during pregnancy. If you are taking medication for your mental health, never suddenly stop. Speak to a healthcare professional about your decision.

If you have a history of mental health difficulties and feel you need medication while pregnant and breastfeeding. Ask to speak to a healthcare professional. It may not need to be a specialist, your GP may be happy to advise you.

Looking after yourself is looking after your baby.

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