

## **Depression or Anxiety During and After Pregnancy**

*When Being Pregnant or Having a New Baby Is Not What You Expected*

### **You and your baby**

Babies need to feel safe and secure with their parent to grow and be healthy. Depression and anxiety can make it hard to help your baby feel safe and secure. You may not enjoy time with your baby or find it difficult to hold, comfort, or play with your baby.

It can be harder to be present for your baby and understand what he or she needs when upset. You may also feel scared to be alone with your baby.

The good news is that depression and anxiety are very treatable. Getting help for yourself helps you as well as your baby. With treatment and support, you and your baby can get back on track to forming a healthy and secure connection.

### **Symptoms**

Depression and anxiety can happen to both moms and dads. For many parents, symptoms begin in pregnancy. For others, symptoms begin after having a baby. Watch for these symptoms:

- Feeling sad, or “empty”
- Feeling worried or anxious
- Lack of energy, feeling very tired
- Lack of interest in normal activities
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little
- Feeling hopeless, helpless, guilty, or worthless
- Feeling moody or irritable
- Problems concentrating or making simple decisions
- Feeling like you are a bad parent, or that your baby would be better off without you
- Thoughts of hurting your baby, even if you can't imagine acting on them
- Thoughts about death or suicide

If these symptoms last longer than two weeks, you may have prenatal (if it is during the pregnancy) or postpartum (if it is after delivery) depression or anxiety.

### **When is it an emergency?**

If you feel like hurting yourself or if your loved one speaks of hurting herself or himself, then please contact one of the resources on the back.

In very rare cases, women can experience very serious symptoms of psychosis after having a baby including unpredictable behavior, confusion and uncontrollable fear. This is a medical emergency and women should be taken immediately to the Emergency Department at the nearest hospital and should not be left alone with their baby.

### **What causes depression and anxiety?**

There is no single known cause. Women who have a history of depression or anxiety are more likely to become depressed or anxious during pregnancy or after birth.

Stress, hormone changes, trauma, lack of support and other stressful experiences such as infertility or a colicky baby can also increase your risk of experiencing depression and anxiety.

If you are depressed or anxious, you need to get help. With treatment and support, you will feel better more quickly and will be able to give your baby the love and attention that all babies need for healthy development.

### **Things you can do**

Being a good parent means taking care of your baby AND yourself. If you take care of yourself, you can take better care of your baby and your family.

Things you can do:

- Talk with your doctor or midwife. Or ask a loved one to help you get the care you need.
- Learn as much as you can about postpartum depression.
- Talk to a therapist, alone or in group

therapy.

- Ask your care provider about medicines

that can be safely used during pregnancy or

while breastfeeding.

- Ask your faith or community leaders about

other support resources.

- Ask friends and family for help with

childcare, chores, and errands.

- Keep active by walking, stretching,

swimming and so on.

- Rest when you have the chance.

- Eat a healthy diet.

Don't give up! It may take more than one try to get the help you need.

### **Stories from Other Mothers**

“I love children and couldn't wait to have my own. Then my husband went back to work. I started having thoughts about hurting my baby. No matter what I did, I couldn't stop the thoughts. I lived in fear but kept it a secret.” – Isabel

“It has been two months since I saw my doctor, and I feel like a different person. The medicine has helped and my family has been very supportive. I have energy again. I love being a mother.” – Malia

### **What you should know**

It is very common to feel many emotions during pregnancy or after having a baby. Some women may feel joyful. Others may feel happy sometimes, and stressed and tearful other times. Most of the time, these feelings are mild and come and go.

For some women, feelings of sadness, worry, or stress can be so strong that it is hard to take care of yourself or your baby. When these symptoms last longer than two weeks, you may have depression or anxiety. This happens to 2 out of 10 women and 1 out of 10 fathers. It can happen during pregnancy or anytime in your baby's first year.

Parents of any culture, age, income level, education, and race can experience depression and anxiety. Even though it is common, it is very important to take seriously. Help is available. With treatment and support, you will feel better.

### **The best treatment**

The most effective treatment for depression and anxiety can include:

- Individual or group therapy
- Medicine that can be safely used during pregnancy or while breastfeeding (prescribed by your healthcare provider)
- Support from your family, friends and community