

Mood Changes During Pregnancy

Can pregnancy cause mood changes?

It is common to have changes in feelings and moods during pregnancy. One minute women may feel happy and excited and the next minute they may feel worried and sad. When women find out they are pregnant, they often worry about how the pregnancy will affect their lives, whether they will be able to take care of a new baby, how they will afford pregnancy and motherhood, and whether the baby will affect their other relationships. These concerns are normal and can occur in any woman, even a woman who was trying very hard to become pregnant.

What are some things I can do to help me feel my best during pregnancy?

Some things that women suggest are helpful in coping with the normal mood changes of pregnancy are:

- Talk to people such as your husband or partner, family and friends about how you are feeling.
- Find ways to spend extra time with friends and family.
- Make exercise a part of every day, even if it's only walking to the mailbox.
- Sit or lie down for 15-20 minutes at home or at work; if you get breaks at work try to use them for relaxing in a quiet place, perhaps reading a favorite book or listening to some relaxing music.
- On weekends or anytime you are at home, try to take a short cat-nap when you get a chance. If you have other children who nap, rest when they are napping.
- Ask for help with household chores and don't worry if everything doesn't get done around the house.
- Talk with other pregnant women and new mothers about their experiences with mood changes in pregnancy.
- Attend a class to learn more about mood changes during and after pregnancy. A class called "Moms and Emotions" is held at the NC Women's Hospital's Women's Health Information Center. The class is open to both pregnant women and their partners and other family members. You can find the schedule for this class by calling 919-843-8463 or by going to the Center's website at www.nchealthywoman.org and looking under "Preparing for the Stork."
- Join a support group for pregnant and postpartum women.

Can the mood changes of pregnancy become a problem?

For some women, the mood changes of pregnancy cause more serious depression and anxiety. These problems are known as the mood disorders of pregnancy. Mood disorders can affect any woman and they can start with little or no warning.

Symptoms of mood disorders include:

- Feeling sad or depressed for more than two weeks
- Having a decreased interest in usual activities
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Having strong anxieties and fears for more than a few days

- Not being able to sleep but feeling very tired
- Sleeping more than usual but not ever feeling rested
- Losing one's appetite and being disinterested in eating
- Eating all of the time
- Thinking about hurting oneself or wanting to be dead
- Having unexpected physical problems like chest pains or difficulty breathing

If I think I am depressed or anxious, what can I do?

Experiencing any of these symptoms can be scary and lonely. If you are feeling depressed or anxious or any of the other symptoms for more than two weeks, you should seek help. If you are afraid that you might hurt yourself you should go to an emergency room as quickly as possible.

Depression and anxiety are medical illnesses just like high blood pressure and they can be safely treated in pregnancy. Discuss any concerns you have, including what you are feeling, with your health care provider. Your provider may suggest drugs that have been found to be safe during pregnancy. Your provider may also refer you to the **UNC Women's Mental Health Clinic for Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders**. This clinic, designed especially for pregnant and postpartum women, provides assessment and treatment, including counseling, medication and ongoing support.

Any woman can make an appointment for herself at the **UNC Women's Mental Health Clinic for Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders** by calling 966-5217. (Located on the first floor of the UNC Neuroscience Building, next to the Women's Hospital)

Other resources you can call for more information or help:

UNC Women's Health Information Center (for "Mom's and Emotions" educational group and additional information) at 843-1759 or www.nchealthywoman.org

NC Family Health Resource Line at 1-800-367-2229

Mental health clinics in your own county

Mental health professionals and counselors including psychiatrists, psychologists, and people listed under "Counselors—Licensed" in the yellow pages, pastoral counselors or others associated with your religious affiliation.

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