

# Pregnancy Stress Management

Hormonal changes, physical limitations, morning sickness, and fears of becoming a parent can all be stressors in a pregnant woman's life. Stress isn't good for you or your baby. High levels of stress that continue for a long time during pregnancy can increase the chances of preterm labor or low birth weight. Stress also taxes your immune system, digestive system, and compromises your ability to sleep.

Here are some tips for managing stress during pregnancy:

- **Listen to your body:** If you feel tired, allow yourself to rest. Do not feel guilty for taking a nap. Being pregnant is physically demanding due to the rapid growth of the baby and the changes in the mother's body. Adequate sleep during the night and resting throughout the day is important for both the mind and body.
- **Fuel up on nutritious foods:** Eating a blend of complex carbohydrates (e.g. whole wheat bread, brown rice, beans, quinoa), healthy fats (e.g. avocado, olive oil, walnuts) and lean protein (e.g. chicken, low mercury fish) will keep glucose levels stable and improve mood. Consuming a balanced diet will also combat fatigue associated with pregnancy. Eating foods high in B vitamins and minerals such as green leafy vegetables, whole grains, nuts and beans will help alleviate stress. Try to avoid stimulants such as coffee, chocolate, refined sugars (e.g. cake, cookies, candy) and caffeinated tea, all of which can increase the stress response. Also, try not to skip meals, especially breakfast, which sets you up for a healthy day!
- **Voice your concerns:** Talk to your partner about your fears and concerns. Your partner may be experiencing the same issues. Lean on your friends or family members for support and guidance. If stress seems to worsen, consider seeking help from a counselor or therapist.
- **Make light exercise a daily habit with your doctor's approval:** Exercise helps the body produce endorphins, which are chemicals released in the brain that reduce stress and improve quality of sleep. Walking outside in the fresh air is also a great way to clear your mind! If aches and pains of pregnancy are a problem try a low-impact workout such as swimming or water aerobics. Always check with your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.
- **Get ready:** While nothing can prepare you for becoming a parent, you can start to get things in order for a smoother transition. Enroll in a birthing class, develop a birth plan with your practitioner, and tour the hospital where you will deliver. Being prepared will put your nerves at ease and will support a pleasant birthing experience.
- **Breathe:** Breathing practices trigger chemicals in the brain, which will slow your heartbeat and calm your body. Being in tune with your breath will also help during labor and delivery. Try a prenatal yoga class that blends gentle movement with stress-reducing breathing techniques. Always check with your doctor before starting a new activity routine
- **Treat yourself:** Give yourself time to read a new book, get a pedicure, or schedule a prenatal massage. Creating time for pampering is a great way to relax and give your body thanks for all the hard work it is doing!
- **Seek help** immediately from a loved one, friend, or neighbor or call 911 if you are having harmful thoughts towards yourself or others.

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