

# DEPRESSION AND PREGNANCY



## What is depression and how common is it in pregnancy?

If you are pregnant, you have probably heard of postpartum depression. But there are women who also experience depression during pregnancy. According to the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists between 14% to 23% of women will struggle with some symptom of depression during pregnancy. This may be due to changes in hormone levels during pregnancy and the stress that comes with this major event.

## What are the signs of depression in pregnancy?

**Some of the following symptoms are usually experienced for two weeks or longer:**

- Persistent sadness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Loss of interest in activities you usually enjoyed
- Recurrent thoughts of death, suicide, or hopelessness
- Anxiety
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Changes in eating habits

## What should I do if I think I have depression and pregnant?

Call your doctor and make an appointment. It is very important to get help from a medical professional before the situation is harmful to you or your pregnancy. Share your

feelings with your partner, close family, or friends for support during this time. If you feel you may hurt yourself, your pregnancy, or someone else, seek emergency medical attention right away.

## Can depression during pregnancy harm my baby?

Untreated depression can have dangerous risks to mother and baby. It can also lead to poor nutrition, alcohol drinking, smoking, and suicidal behaviors, which in turn can cause premature birth, low birth weight and developmental problems. A woman who is depressed often does not have the strength or desire to properly care for herself or her baby.

## Can taking medicine for depression during my pregnancy cause birth defects or other problems for my baby?

Studies have been done on many antidepressant medications during pregnancy and have not been linked to an increased chance of birth defects. Studies on some antidepressants have shown that their administration during the third trimester can have effects on the newborn after birth.

## I am considering trying an alternative treatment to treat depression during my pregnancy. Is this safe?

There are not enough studies on many herbal remedies, supplements, or other nontraditional therapies to know if it is okay to use them during pregnancy. It is important to discuss any alternative therapy you are considering with your obstetric and mental health care providers before using it.

## Can breastfeeding be affected by depression?

Breastfeeding improves the health of both mother and baby. Studies have found that women with depression during pregnancy tend to breastfeed their babies for less time. If you can continue breastfeeding, it has been shown that symptoms can lessen and even prevent postpartum depression. Look for people who understand you and can help you through difficult periods in the early stages of breastfeeding. Be sure to discuss breastfeeding concerns with your health care provider.



For more information, please contact the Preventive & Educational Community Services Unit **787.277.6571**.



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