ANXIETY and YOUR PREGNANCY

Pregnancy can be one of the best times of a woman’s life, but also one of the most stressful. During pregnancy women experience a wide range of emotions. Sometimes it is difficult to separate normal feelings from mental health issues that may require treatment. One mental health issue that is often ignored in pregnancy is anxiety. Anxiety is different from regular occasional worry. When worry becomes pervasive and overwhelming, a woman should discuss it with her doctor. It is always beneficial to seek treatment before worry and anxiety spiral out of control. Below are some questions and answers about anxiety and treatment options for women that are pregnant.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is excessive and uncontrollable worry. Anxiety interferes with everyday activities and lasts more than one month. Research has found 8-10% of women have anxiety during pregnancy. It can be hard to tell what is normal, pregnancy-related worry and true anxiety. It’s normal to worry about your pregnancy or your baby’s health. It is not normal when you think so much about these things that you cannot sleep or do usual activities. Worry becomes anxiety when it is frequent, time-consuming, intrusive and irrational.

What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Constant worry, fatigue, irritability, tension, difficulty concentrating and insomnia are all symptoms of anxiety. Anxiety often looks like extreme nervousness or worry, but the worry is difficult to control. Anxiety disorder can cause distress or disruption in everyday life. Anxiety can cause relationship problems or difficulties at work or school.

I have never told my doctor about my anxiety, should I?

If you think you have anxiety or just worry too much, tell someone! It is important to be physically and mentally healthy during your pregnancy. Anxiety is treatable.
Untreated anxiety has been related to preterm birth and low birth weight. Additionally, almost half of women with anxiety disorder also have symptoms of depression. After delivery, untreated anxiety or depression can impact bonding with your baby. Recurrent negative thinking can cause you to be less involved with your baby. You should tell your doctor so he can screen for mental health and discuss possible treatment options. Discussing anxiety with your physician can ensure good mental health both during and after your pregnancy.

*Can being anxious affect the baby?*

There is very little information about the effects of anxiety in pregnancy on the infant. In the studies that do exist, it is difficult to separate the effects of anxiety during pregnancy from the impact on the baby of having an anxious mother. However, it is unlikely that anxiety alone is able to increase the chance of birth defects.

*What types of treatment are available for anxiety?*

Specific types of talk therapy/counseling are effective for treating mild to moderate symptoms of anxiety. Women with more severe anxiety may benefit from medication. The best treatment for your anxiety can be determined by discussing your symptoms with your physician.

*If I take medication for anxiety during my pregnancy will it harm the baby?*

There are several different medication options for treating anxiety in pregnancy. For further information about medications for anxiety check out MotherToBaby.org or call MotherToBaby at 1-866-626-6847 to receive information on specific medications you have discussed with your physician. MotherToBaby is a helpful, national organization that answers questions, for free, about medications that are safe during pregnancy or breastfeeding.

*I have been taking medication for anxiety and I am trying to get pregnant, should I stop my medication?*
No, stopping medication that you have been taking can lead to a relapse of your symptoms. Discuss your treatment with your physician before stopping medications.

*I don’t want to take medication for anxiety. What should I do?*

Counseling can be effective for many types of anxiety. Cognitive behavioral therapy, relaxation and mindfulness therapy have been found to work for mild to moderate anxiety symptoms.

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