

Pregnancy and Depression: Not as Uncommon as We Think

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During Pregnancy, once thought a protective period for depression, women have a 10-20% chance of becoming depressed. It can be difficult to identify depression during pregnancy, as decreased energy, insomnia, appetite disturbance, and decreased libido are all common during pregnancy. However, if a woman experiences thoughts of suicide, feelings of hopelessness and guilt, sadness, and has little enjoyment in activities usually found enjoyable, then depression must be considered.

Depression in pregnancy carries significant risks, including:

- Poor self-care
- Decreased appetite
- Lower birth weight
- Preterm birth
- Small head circumference in the baby
- Postpartum depression

Treating depression during pregnancy can be complex, as conventional pharmacological treatment is not without some risk. There are methods of helping to prevent and alleviate depressed mood in pregnancy that do not entail pharmacological aides.

Psychotherapy: A first line treatment for depression during and just following pregnancy that has been found to be quite helpful.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acid supplements with DHA, docosahexaenoic acid, and EPA, eicosapentaenoic acid. The most beneficial are found in fish oil, not flaxseed. Omega 3s are essential for health and development. We cannot produce them – they must be consumed. Due to concerns about toxins in fish, taking only purified, reputable brands is essential. Not only do Omega 3s support mood, but they also help in the healthy development of the baby.

Nutrition: Certain foods promote healthier mood and cognitive functioning. A diet consisting of natural foods rich in a variety of fruits and vegetables, grains, low sugar, dairy, lean protein, non-refined oils, and being low in processed food and meat, and refined carbohydrates is advised.

Vitamin D: Americans in general are deficient in Vitamin D, especially during pregnancy. It is important to ask your doctor to check your Vitamin D level and supplement if needed.

Exercise: Staying active with moderate cardiovascular activity, 30-40 minutes, at least three times a week is quite beneficial to mood. Additionally, yoga enhances physical and emotional health.

Lifestyle: Eliminating caffeine, sleeping 8 hours a night, and maintaining a healthy weight is helpful. Additionally, meditation is supportive of healthy mood and reduced anxiety.

For pregnant women who are suffering from depression whether it is mild,

moderate, or severe, discussion regarding the best method of treatment with your healthcare provider is essential, as depression can have serious consequences for mom and baby.

<http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-health/depression-during-pregnancy/>

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/depression-pregnancy.html>

Postpartum Support International

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