

Mental wellbeing during pregnancy

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Stress or tension in everyday life is normal and helps to keep us alert and active. However, there are times when we may feel we can no longer cope with stress and when we suffer feelings of distress. This can happen at times in our lives when we are experiencing a major life event. Pregnancy is one of those times. This is when your emotional state is more fragile; decisions need to be made, and you will be experiencing and thinking about changes in your lifestyle.

Feelings and emotions

While you are adjusting to being pregnant, you are likely to have feelings of change: about yourself, the baby and the future.

You may also experience tiredness and nausea, which occur in the early stages but will improve as your pregnancy progresses.

Emotional symptoms may include: depressed mood, loss of interest and enjoyment, reduced concentration and attention, reduced self esteem and self confidence, ideas of guilt and unworthiness, bleak and pessimistic views of the future. Ideas or acts of self harm or suicide. Disturbed sleep. Diminished appetite. Denial, anger, mood swings. Rejection of partner and baby. Anxiety, panic attacks. Inappropriate and or obsessional thoughts. Loss of sexual desire. Self blame and inadequacy.

You may also experience swings of emotion, so that you may feel elated one day and weepy the next. These changes in mood are thought to be caused by the hormonal (chemical) changes that happen in the body during pregnancy.

You may be worried about how you will cope with the birth, and having a new baby. Talk to your midwife about these fears; she will ensure that you are well prepared for the delivery and know about the choices available to you.

Physical symptoms may include: sleep disturbances, appetite changes, digestive problems, lack of concentration, headaches, blurred vision, stomach pains, chest pains, reduced energy and marked tiredness after only slight effort.

Everyone reacts differently to having a baby; so you may suffer from some or none of these problems. Remember that your midwife can offer a great deal of help and support.

If you have had mental health problems in the past, you may be referred to another health professional for further help; for example a community psychiatric nurse, another specialist midwife, GP or health visitor.

‘Baby blues’ and postnatal depression

Many women feel low shortly after the birth of their baby. It

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