



PSYCH NOTES™

Courtesy of

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ANXIETY DURING PREGNANCY

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For the majority of women, pregnancy is a time filled with extreme happiness and great anticipation. Books and magazines geared toward expectant mothers joyously discuss baby shower games and nursery decor themes, recommend the best baby products, and present thousands of baby names with associated meanings and origins. Yet unfortunately, this major life transition is rarely that simplistic and carefree.

Regardless of the extent to which a pregnancy is planned for and wanted, many women experience varying degrees of anxiety during this time. Some common concerns among mothers-to-be include:

- the health of the baby,
- genetic abnormalities or diseases,
- complications at birth,
- effects of your own behavior during pregnancy on the baby,
- nutrition and exercise,
- exposure to drugs, toxins, or infections,
- labor and delivery,
- coping with pain,
- losing control,
- partner's response,
- financial issues,
- loss of income,
- increased expenses,
- job security,
- parenting concerns, and
- changing relationships with partner, family, and friends.

This list represents only some of the many possible stressors faced by women during their pregnancies. In the complicated world we live in, various circumstances that women encounter make them increasingly vulnerable to anxiety during this time of their lives. For example, the pregnancy may have been unplanned and occurring at an inopportune time, the couple may not be committed to one another, or there may be a lack of emotional support from one's family members or spouse. In addition, the conditions surrounding the actual pregnancy may give rise to increased anxiety (i.e., history of miscarriage, fertility treatments, multiple pregnancy, or complications during pregnancy).

Finally, a prior history of anxiety, depression, or other psychologically-based illnesses places women at higher risk for such difficulties during pregnancy.

For most women, pregnancy is analogous to an emotional roller coaster. Years of dreams and aspirations for your unborn baby are often clouded by fears, sadness, and confusion. If you believe that you are experiencing excessive anxiety, there are several steps you can take to help ensure your own, as well as your baby's, well-being. Surround yourself with people who are caring and supportive. Maintain open and honest communication with your partner, and seek marital/couple counseling if appropriate. Learn relaxation strategies, such as deep breathing, visualization, and progressive muscle relaxation. Process your feelings by maintaining a journal, listening to music, exercising and eating healthy. Most importantly, know that thousands of women suffer from anxiety during pregnancy, and that interventions are available by qualified professionals to help reduce the debilitating effects such symptoms can have on women, babies, and families.

Dr. Stacey Devaux is an Associate Psychologist with East End Psychological Services, P.C., in Miller Place, NY. Dr. Devaux received her degree from Hofstra University in Hempstead, NY, where she conducted research on anxiety and intimate relationships. Dr. Devaux specializes in the identification and treatment of anxiety disorders, particularly generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, specific phobias, separation anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), in all populations. For more information, Dr. Devaux can be reached at East End Psychological Services, P.C., 565 Route 25A, Suite 201, Miller Place, NY 11764 or call (631) 821-7214.

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