

Stress and pregnancy

The news of a pregnancy can generate a variety of emotions such as surprise, happiness, doubts, and concerns. Physical and hormonal changes, waiting for the arrival of the baby, among other reasons, could cause the development of stress.



Stress is a natural response of the body. It is activated every time we feel that something threatens our survival or that we do not have the possibility of solving a situation. Experiencing a little stress in some situations is normal and can help us overcome them. However, facing stress for a long time can cause changes and situations in our health condition and altering the feeling of well-being. Stress can be caused by various reasons; the same situation can be stressful for some people while not for others. If a stressful event occurs, it may manifest as:

- **Physical** - palpitations, sweating, hair loss, tremors, muscle spasms, stomach problems, changes in appetite, blurred vision, dizziness, chest pain, headache, jaw tension, among others.
- **Mental** - confusion, memory loss, nightmares, difficulty in making decisions, changes in sleep patterns, among others.
- **Emotional** - anxiety attacks, fear, feelings of guilt, sadness, irritability, anger, crying, among others.
- **Social** - isolation from family and friends, stop participating in activities that you previously enjoyed, start high-risk behaviors such as abuse of alcohol, tobacco, medications, or other drugs.

Some situations that could generate stress during pregnancy:

- The typical discomforts of pregnancy (nausea, vomiting, disgust, sleep, fatigue, constipation).
- Health complications due to a pre-existing illness or the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Concern about the baby's development or what the time of delivery will be like.
- Unforeseen situations.
- Employment or economic difficulties
- Face making an important decision.
- Loss of a loved one.

Being pregnant and experiencing extreme stress conditions can lead to health problems such as increased blood pressure, blood glucose levels, and heart disease. During pregnancy, this type of stress can increase the chance of having a premature baby (born before 37 weeks gestation) or a low-birth-weight baby (weighing less than 5½ pounds). These babies are at higher risk for health problems that require hospital care.

There are different ways to manage stress, however, there are strategies that can be harmful to our health. For example, consuming foods high in sugar to manage stress levels, will increase the risk that blood glucose levels will rise. Here are some tips for managing stress effectively:

- Identify someone you trust with whom you can talk.
- Avoid situations or people that cause you stress.
- Have rest periods during the day.

- Eat foods low in fat, salt, and sugar; and avoid skipping meals.
- Hydrate well and avoid energy drinks such as coffee and soft drinks.
- Do a hobby or activity that you enjoy.
- Integrate some type of body movement such as stretching, walking, low impact exercises, dancing, swimming, yoga, among others. Check with your doctor before starting.
- Continue the use of medications that have been indicated and prescribed by your obstetrician gynecologist. Do not stop your treatment unless your doctor tells you to.

If stress levels have risen steadily or if you identify that it may already be transforming into anxiety (constant feelings of nervousness, distress, or fear) or depression (constant feelings of sadness, emptiness, or discouragement), it is important to seek professional help. Feel free to contact your healthcare provider and loved ones, they can help you coordinate the necessary service.

Social and Emotional Aspect

For tips, tools, and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after your medical treatment, please visit your primary care physician or contact the following phone lines:

Medical Advice Line

1-844-347-7801

TTY/TDD 1-844-347-7804

References:

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/preconceptioncare/conditioninfo/stress>

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/it-starts-with-mom/managing-stress-during-pregnancy.aspx>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/english/ages-stages/prenatal/pages/depression-and-anxiety-during-pregnancy-and-after-birth-faqs.aspx>