

Fact Sheet: Pregnancy & Mental Health

Pregnancy can be an exciting but stressful time. It is normal for women to struggle with the physical and emotional changes that come with pregnancy.

What Can I Expect?

Some normal adjustments happen with pregnancy. These include crying, being tired, feeling anxious, irritable or angry, and changes in sleep, appetite or mood. You also might feel unsure or overwhelmed. These are all common.

How can I if I am depressed?

If your feelings get more intense and keep you from doing daily activities or enjoying your life, ask your midwife, doctor, naturopath or another healthcare provider for help. They know many ways to help and can explain your options to you.

If you have a history of mental health concerns, be sure to let them know.

If you feel that your healthcare provider does not understand your concerns, seek help elsewhere. Other healthcare providers do understand and are ready to help you.

For more support, you can also:

1. Ask family and friends to help

Tell people what you need so they can support you. Ask for help with cleaning, shopping or other chores. If you have other children, ask for a few hours of regular childcare so you can have a break.

3. Connect with others in your community

Although you may not know it, other women also struggle through pregnancy and early parenting. Connect with them to share your feelings and to learn from each other. Ask your healthcare provider about mother's support groups in your area.

4. Talk to a counsellor

Counsellors provide a safe place to share your feelings and can help you find ways to cope. When choosing counsellors or other supports in your community, ask if they have experience working with pregnant women and mothers.

5. N.U.R.S.E Yourself

On the other side of this page, you will find some simple tips for caring for yourself.

Disclaimer: This information is for your learning only. It should not be used to replace a visit with a healthcare provider.



Fact Sheet: N.U.R.S.E Yourself: Self Care for Pregnant Women

Adapted from: *Women's Moods: what every woman must know about hormones, the brain, and emotional health* by D. Sichel and J. Driscoll, Harper Collins, 1999.

Pregnancy can be an exciting yet stressful time. We encourage new mothers to use the N.U.R.S.E. model to care for themselves. Pregnancy is a great time to practice these important skills!

N is for **nourishment**:

- Eat regular meals. If you are not feeling hungry, set regular times for snacks or light meals to encourage yourself to eat.
- Make preparing meals easy. Buy easy-to-prepare nutritious foods. The most important thing is to eat, not cook.
- Try to eat from all food groups to get all the nutrients and energy your body needs before, during and after pregnancy. Don't diet to lose weight after baby is born. Allow your body to find its natural size.

U is for **understanding**:

- Hormones naturally make women's moods go up and down. Pregnancy and parenting are often stressful and you may have conflicted feelings about them. Understanding that moods are always changing can help you be gentle with yourself when you are struggling with intense feelings.
- Your body gives you signs about how you are doing. Pay attention and ask yourself: "What do I need right now: Support? Rest? Food? Someone to talk to?" Give yourself what you need. Ask others to help.
- All emotions are okay. Try to accept your feelings without judging them or pushing them away. Explore different ways to express difficult emotions safely.

R is for **rest and relaxation**:

- Knowing how to relax ourselves and getting enough rest are important for good health. This is a good time to try new relaxation techniques.
- Try deep breathing, listening to music, talking to a friend, or other ways to get calm and to reduce stress. Practice them when you are re doing well so they are easier to do when you feel stress.

S is for **self**:

- Do things you enjoy that make you feel good about yourself.
- Explore new ideas or activities. Positive relationships, time alone, being in nature, being creative, enjoying music, or writing in a journal are just a few of the things that people do to care for themselves
- Have hope: Remember that you are not alone in your feelings and many other women feel the same way. Connect with other pregnant women in your area for support.

E is for **energy**:

- Building energy increases heart rate and improves mental and physical wellbeing.
- Physical activity and movement is a good way to relieve stress when feeling tense.
- The most important thing is to choose activities that you enjoy.