

## Emotional Wellness During and After Pregnancy

There are few experiences in life that are as significant as that of being a mother. Having a baby can be an exhilarating and sometimes unpredictable time. Along with the physical changes of childbearing and giving birth, a woman may also go through emotional changes as she prepares for motherhood. Sometimes, instead of being excited, joyful and in the pink of health, she can find herself struggling to cope with the pregnancy, or with caring and adapting to a newborn in her life.

A woman's emotional well-being during this period of time is just as important as her physical health. During pregnancy, a woman under tremendous stress may go into early labour. After delivery, a mother who experiences symptoms of depression may have difficulty bonding with the child.

Studies have shown that up to one in 10 women would experience depression during pregnancy or after birth. If you are having the symptoms of depression or anxiety for most days up to two weeks, or you have difficulties functioning in your daily life, you are entitled to be cared for, so that you can go on to care for your loved ones.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Low mood
- Irritability
- Tearfulness
- Poor sleep
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Poor appetite
- Poor concentration or forgetfulness
- Loss of energy
- Excessive self-blame or guilt
- Feeling hopeless or that life is meaningless

Some women may also have accompanying anxiety symptoms, such as:

- Feeling tense
- Palpitations, feeling breathless, chest tightness
- Panic attacks
- Excessive worries about the baby

Depression is highly treatable if you are willing to seek help. Treatment involves therapy or counseling, and medication where necessary. Women often worry about the safety of antidepressants, but there are options available for pregnant or lactating women that are clinically beneficial.

For a consultation with a KKH Women's Mental Wellness specialist, please call our Appointments / Specialist Outpatient Clinics Enquiries Hotline at **6294-4050**.

If you need information or advice about getting help for postnatal depression, drop us an email at [pnd@kkh.com.sg](mailto:pnd@kkh.com.sg). We will reply within 3 to 5 working days.

## **Six tips for keeping emotionally well during and after pregnancy**

### **Getting into a routine**

If dealing with your pregnancy or coping with a newborn gets too overwhelming for you, establishing a routine will help you feel better in control of your life. If you are caring for your newborn, try working your activities and schedule around the baby as he needs your care. Also, do allow flexibility to changes in your schedule, as an infant's feeding and sleeping patterns may change over time.

### **Taking care of yourself**

Taking care of yourself means allowing you to have time for yourself to rest or to do little things that you enjoy. It will do you a world of good to be out of the house for a breather or fresh air, even for a short period of time. You may even want to go window shopping or catch up with a friend.

### **Eating well and exercising**

Taking care of yourself also means taking care of what you eat so that you have the right nutrition needed to carry your baby, or to recover from childbirth. Exercise would help build up your immune system and prepare you with the energy needed for your pregnancy and childbirth. Please consult your obstetrician for advice if you are not sure of what is appropriate for you.

### **Talking to someone**

Talking to your husband or friend, a doctor or counselor about your thoughts and feelings is also a great way of releasing your pent-up emotions. You should be able to get your emotional support from your husband, but someone with symptoms of depression and anxiety should benefit from seeking advice and treatment from a specialist.

### **Writing your thoughts down**

Another way to keep your days going is to write your thoughts and feelings down in a diary. Having a baby is a life-changing and significant time for you. Writing down your thoughts could help you to keep track and gain a better perspective of what happened and how things have affected you.

### **Getting people to help**

Coping with pregnancy or a newborn can be an enormous stress for many people. Do not be embarrassed about getting the help that you need, may it be with household chores or with caring for your baby or older child. You would need to rest and conserve your energy for you and your baby.

## **Antenatal and postnatal emotional health screening**

KKH conducts active screening for antenatal and postnatal depression in selected clinics, and we hope that this will enable us to identify those suffering from emotional disorders early, so that care and support may be provided early.