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What I Tell My Pregnant and Postpartum Patients About Depression and Anxiety

As an ob-gyn and psychiatrist, I talk with patients about mental health conditions and treatment options.



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Pregnancy and childbirth can be a vulnerable time in your life. You may experience depression and anxiety while you are pregnant or after you give birth. And you may not be sure how to get the help that you need to cope with these common challenges.

Treatment is available, and it can make all the difference for you and your baby. As an ob-gyn and a women's behavioral health psychiatrist, I help patients struggling with mental health conditions. I see their lives turn around with treatment.

Here is what I wish everyone knew about depression and anxiety during and after pregnancy—including when, why, and how to find the help you need.

Learning to watch for symptoms is key.

Mental health changes are very common during and after pregnancy. One in five pregnant or postpartum women experience depression, anxiety, or scary thoughts. It helps to understand what signs to look out for.

People with anxiety may often feel worried about everyday situations. They may have racing thoughts and a feeling that something very bad is about to happen. They may experience trembling, tense muscles, sweating, and nausea.

People with depression may feel sad and lose their interest and enjoyment in daily activities. They may feel hopeless, worthless, lose motivation, and think about wanting to die or hurt themselves.

Both anxiety and depression can cause irritability, trouble sleeping, and poor concentration.

Treatment can help you and your baby.

If you think you may have anxiety or depression, finding help is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and your family. Treating mental health conditions can help you be healthier and feel better. Treatment also can help you have a healthier pregnancy, help you take better care of your baby, and improve the long-term health of you and your child.

Seeking treatment for depression or anxiety while you're pregnant can prevent problems that might arise if you don't get treatment. When your mental health improves, you may have a lower risk of preterm birth, having a baby with low birth weight, or experiencing poor mother-baby bonding.

There are several treatment options. They all start with a conversation.

Talk about how you are feeling with your ob-gyn or primary care doctor. Your doctor may offer treatment options or refer you to a psychiatric specialist.

Treatment for anxiety and depression can involve medication and therapy. Medications can be taken even while pregnant and breastfeeding. You and your doctor should talk together about treatment options and the best path for you. Support groups and community resources may help too.

You can get through this. Help is within reach.

It can be hard to seek help when you are hurting and vulnerable. Any step you can take to get help can have life-changing results for you and your entire family.

One helpful resource is [Postpartum Support International](#). They offer emotional support resources both during and after pregnancy. Reach out to their helpline via phone call or text (800-944-4773). They host [online support group meetings](#) and weekly [Chat With an Expert](#) phone sessions on Wednesdays.

You can also contact the [National Maternal Mental Health Hotline](#) at 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262). Or you can reach the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) by dialing 988 or using their [live online chat](#).

Remember, depression and anxiety are real and very treatable conditions. You do not have to suffer in silence.

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