



ARTICLE

having a meaningful conversation with your partner about mental health

Depression during and after pregnancy can be sneaky – the symptoms can sound a lot like the normal stressors of pregnancy and parenthood. To make things even trickier, the symptoms themselves can make the women experiencing them doubt themselves. A woman may wonder if what she’s feeling are just “baby blues” or whether there’s a more serious problem going on. During this time, women who are parenting with a partner have a valuable ally on their side – someone who sees them every day and can take note of their moods from the outside.

If you’re at an increased risk of depression during or after pregnancy, talking to your partner ahead of time can help both of you figure out a plan of action for watching for signs of depression. This can mean the difference between seeking out help early on and waiting until later, when symptoms have gotten worse.

Opening up the conversation

Mental health isn’t always easy to talk about, but as you and your partner build a family together, mental health is just one of the many factors that’s going to go into forming a healthy, supportive environment for your children and each other. If you have a history of depression or other mood disorders, you may have already started to talk about strategies for keeping an eye on your mental health during pregnancy and postpartum, but even if you’ve already touched on the subject, it’s a good idea to keep checking in as both your feelings and your pregnancy progress.

- **Make the time to check in with each other:** Sure, it might sound a little hokey, especially if it’s not a normal part of your dynamic, but setting aside a specific time to talk about your feelings and your partner’s – because you’re both going to have moments when you start to feel overwhelmed, and may need each other’s support more than ever – can be a great way to make sure you’re both on the same page. Making time to check in emotionally can be a great reminder that you’re not alone – both in that your partner is there on your team, and in that they’re also

going to have a hard time and want to turn to you for support. Remembering that it’s a mutual relationship can be an important part of feeling comfortable reaching out when you start to feel overwhelmed.

- **Take feedback as it’s intended:** When you’re having a hard time, sometimes having someone – even someone as close to you as your partner – notice that you’re having trouble can feel like criticism, or a failure. Generally, though, if your partner is speaking up, it’s almost certainly out of worry and out of love. Right now, you and your partner can talk about the best way to open up a conversation about mental health, and about how both of you will try to handle the subject if one of you seems to be struggling later.
- **Ask the professionals:** If you’re having a hard time starting this conversation, consider bringing your partner along with you to talk to a doctor, therapist, or other healthcare provider about your risk of depression during and after pregnancy, what that might look like, and what your partner’s role can be. Sometimes, having an impartial third party in the room can help you and your partner focus in on the subject of depression as a medical issue.
- **Take care of each other:** Dads and other non-gestational parents can have postpartum depression as well. In addition, being a new parent is stressful and can be difficult for anyone. Your partner needs to take care of their mental health as well, and you can keep an eye out for if they start to feel especially run down, or like they might need a little extra help, just as they can for you.

In the end, the best person to talk to about your mental health during pregnancy and postpartum is the person you feel the most comfortable talking to about your mental health. That person may not always be your partner, and that’s okay, too. But it’s also important to keep in mind that talking to your partner can be an important part of making sure you have a strong, engaged support system when you need one most.

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