

- Pregnancy

## Protecting your mental health while pregnant

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PREGNANCY is a life-changing experience for women, as they prepare to bring a new life into the world.



It is a time of great joy and anticipation, but it can also be a time of stress and anxiety. Mental health issues are common during pregnancy, and it is essential to take care of your mental health to ensure a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby.

Mental health issues during pregnancy can take many forms, including depression, anxiety, and stress. These issues can be caused by a variety of factors, including hormonal changes, relationship problems, financial stress, and physical discomfort.

Whatever the cause, it is important to address mental health issues during pregnancy to ensure the best possible outcome for both the mother and the baby.

According to Shivangi Sagar, counselling psychologist and co-founder of HopeQure, a platform for counselling and therapy consultations, mood swings are normal during pregnancy, but if you feel nervous or down all the time, it could be a sign of something deeper.

She says, “stress over being pregnant, changes in your body during the pregnancy, and everyday worries can take a toll”.

“Depression and anxiety are the two most common and prevalent disorders faced during pregnancy.

“The prevalence ranges from 8% to 30% all over the world.

“Antenatal depression – depression before the birth of the child – is a strong predictor of postnatal depression.

“Depression is sadness or feeling down or irritable for weeks or months at a time.

“Someone may have depression before getting pregnant. But it also can start during pregnancy for a number of reasons – for example, if a woman isn't happy about being pregnant or is dealing with a lot of stress at work or stress at home.

“Whereas anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear over things that might happen. If you worry a lot anyway, many things can stress you out during pregnancy.

“You might worry that you won't be a good parent or that you can't afford to raise a baby,” says Shivangi.

While there is a probability of adverse mental health concerns in mothers during pregnancy, it is of importance that these symptoms can be managed.

Here are seven ways Shivangi suggests you protect your mental health while pregnant:

#### Seek prenatal care

Regular prenatal care is critical to identify mental health issues early on and provide support and resources to address them.

Prenatal care can also ensure that both the mother and the baby are healthy throughout the pregnancy.

Prenatal yoga is a powerful tool for managing depression. It can assist in elevating mood during pregnancy and provide strength to the body, especially the pelvic floor, hip, and abdominal core muscles.

It gives the mother a healthier pregnancy and research has confirmed that a healthy mother is more likely to have a healthy baby.

#### Increase awareness

It is important to take notice that you are facing mental health issues. It can be helpful to talk to a professional and help you deal with your specific issues.

#### Practise positive self-talk

Sometimes writing a few positive affirmations and reading them aloud can help in uplifting the mind. It is significant that pregnant women should focus their attention on positive things.

#### Communicate openly

Talking about what is causing you stress with your partner, family, friends or a professional can help you understand your stressors and how you can manage them.

It will also help your loved ones support you during this period.

Having a strong support system during pregnancy can provide valuable emotional support and connection. Joining a support group for pregnant women can also provide a valuable source of support.

#### Prioritise self-care

Taking care of oneself during pregnancy is essential to reduce stress and promote positive mental health.

This can include getting enough rest, eating a healthy diet, and engaging in regular physical activity.

Taking time for oneself to relax and engage in activities can also help reduce stress.

#### Breathing exercises

You can try breathing exercises and help you calm yourself in times of stress and anxiety.

You can also try mindfulness and meditation techniques to regulate your emotions.

#### Seek professional help

If you are experiencing severe or persistent mental health issues during pregnancy, it's essential to seek professional help.

This can include therapy, medication, or a combination of both. Health-care providers can help identify the best treatment options for individual needs.