



Positively Pregnant

A guide to *Ante*-Natal Depression



Understanding Depression,
Stress and Anxiety in Pregnancy
...and What can Help

Provided by

 **Karma Living**
SANCTUARY FOR THE SOUL



Welcome

At Positively Pregnant we want you to know that if you're experiencing the symptoms of depression, stress or anxiety in pregnancy you are not alone.

This booklet is designed to help you, your partner, family and friends find helpful and positive ways through your pregnancy with the world's first ever source of information dedicated to this topic. www.positivelypregnant.org



Index

Page 3 - **Pregnant and anxious?** You are not alone

Pages 4, 5 & 6 - **Q&A** about ante-natal depression

Pages 7, 8 & 9 - **Top Tips** for Positive Steps in Pregnancy

Page 10 - **The Final Word**

Page 11 - **Links of Interest**

Page 12 - **Disclaimer & Copyright**

Pregnant and Anxious?

You are not alone.

When you find out you're pregnant the last thing you may expect to feel is depressed, anxious or stressed. Those closest to you may be surprised if you're not 'blooming' or happy about the fact you are expecting. But ante-natal depression affects around one in ten pregnant women.

When you're feeling low, it's important to have people around you who can support you. Your doctor and midwife are the obvious choice for your *physical* care but they are also there to support any *mental* health concerns you may have; new guidelines are in place to make sure they look after you. Your family and friends will also play an important part in being there for you during your pregnancy. Encourage them to keep comments constructive and ask how they can help rather than assuming they know what you need. Ask them if they'd like to read this guide.

This booklet is not intended to replace any medical advice but designed as a tool to help you find helpful ways forward during your pregnancy and to work alongside the support you have available to you locally. At Positively Pregnant we're all about finding ways to take positive action – helpful ways to help yourself.

Q&A about *Ante-Natal* Depression

What are the symptoms of ante-natal depression?

Everyone is different. One woman's experience of depression during pregnancy will vary from another's. You may recognise your symptoms as stress or anxiety rather than depression. Some symptoms may include:

- **Excessive crying** (more than normal in pregnancy)
- **Tired** but unable to sleep
- **No appetite** or over eating
- **Feeling isolated** and lonely
- **Irritability** and irrational thoughts
- **Lack of interest** in anything
- **Obsessive thoughts** and behaviour

I recognise the symptoms, what should I do now?

Have a chat with your doctor and/or midwife. They are there to help you. With the new UK guidelines on mental health in pregnancy, GPs and midwives have options available which they can discuss with you. Speak with close family and friends about how you feel and keep communicating with them about what you're feeling. Take them to appointments with you if that might help.

Q&A about *Ante-Natal* Depression

My pregnant partner is really low. What can I do?

Ask her what would help. Sometimes making an assumption about what a person needs when they're feeling low can be unhelpful and may seem to make things worse. If you're really worried about your partner call NHS direct on 0845 46 47 and list your concerns. They should be able to give you some helpful advice about what to do next.

I really wanted this baby! Why do I feel depressed?

The causes of ante-natal depression are different for everyone. They can include:

- **Chemical or hormonal** imbalance due to pregnancy
- **A fear of losing the baby**, possibly due to a history of miscarriage or still birth
- **Worrying about a relationship**, work or money
- **History of depression** or anxiety-related problems
- **Concerns for your changing shape** or weight
- **Uncertainty** around the future
- **Unplanned or unexpected** pregnancy

The main thing is that you recognise how you're feeling and you ask for help from those who can support you.

Q&A about *Ante-Natal* Depression

If I have ante-natal depression, will I have post-natal depression?

Some women may go on to experience depression once the baby is born. At the time of writing, no direct link has been made between ante-natal and post-natal depression.

Since I found out I was pregnant, my partner and I aren't getting on. Why is this happening?

For some people, pregnancy brings with it natural worries about the future – for both partners. The possibility of changes around lifestyle, work, money and relationships can cause conflict if these concerns aren't communicated. Talk to each other about how you feel and what's on your mind. If things get difficult, consider speaking to a professional organisation such as Relate (www.relate.org.uk).

I had ante-natal depression with my last pregnancy. Will I get it again?

Every experience of pregnancy is different. If you're thinking about having another baby, speak to your doctor about any concerns you have or consider speaking to a qualified counsellor to talk through what's on your mind.

Top Tips

for Positive Steps in Pregnancy

Ask for Help

Don't be afraid to talk about how you feel and ask for help – you have nothing to be ashamed of – if you'd broken your leg, you wouldn't feel guilty; your mental health is no different. Speak to your doctor and/or midwife about what's on your mind and make sure that people around you have the opportunity to support you. If they don't know something's wrong, they can't help. If you feel desperate call the Samaritans on 08457 90 90 90 then speak to your doctor as soon as possible.

Take Baby Steps

Start with a goal for each day, even if it's just getting out of bed. Make sure your goals are SMART – specific, measurable (i.e. you'll recognise the result), achievable, realistic and have a time frame. Reward yourself with something when you've achieved your goal when you've done what you set out to do – perhaps a new piece of clothing or some chocolate! Taking small steps towards feeling better will help make a difference to your day, and ultimately your pregnancy experience.

Top Tips

for Positive Steps in Pregnancy

Find a relaxation technique which works for you

People have different ways of relaxing so find one that works for you. Spending time with friends may help or perhaps learning a breathing technique will help – it will also serve you well in labour! Investigate different options for relaxing and set time aside every day to do this.

Join a new local network or class

There are more and more services available now which are specifically designed for pregnancy including pregnancy yoga and aqua natal. Consider making enquiries about some of these classes locally; your midwife may even be able to put you in touch with some of them.

Challenge your negative thinking

Sometimes your thoughts will spiral and become unhelpful. This chatter usually includes words like 'should', 'must' and 'ought' and what you believe others are thinking about you. Challenge what you think you know and if in doubt consider some counselling to deal with unhelpful thinking/behaviour.

Top Tips

for Positive Steps in Pregnancy

A good night's sleep

Sleeping can be difficult as your size changes but setting yourself up for a good night's sleep with a helpful bedtime routine can make all the difference. Avoid caffeine at least three hours before you go to bed and consider having a nice warm bath or listening to some calming music in the hour leading up to bedtime.

Write it down

Writing a journal can be very therapeutic not just for marking landmarks in your pregnancy, like each trimester, but in helping you understand why you feel the way you do. You can add to your journal whenever you want but setting time aside to do this every day can be useful. Go back and read through the journal from time to time, particularly recognising if you had a better day so you can make a note of what helps you. If you feel comfortable, you can share this journal with your doctor, midwife or, if you see one, a counsellor to help you challenge behaviours or beliefs which aren't working for you.

The Final Word

Take control. Let the rest go.

Pregnancy is not an illness...

...but depression, stress and anxiety can be unhealthy if left unchecked. Everyone feels down, anxious or stressed at sometime in their lives and it's natural to have worries about what the future holds for you and your new family. Take positive action to help yourself; start by finding out what help and support is available locally.

If your pregnancy is unplanned or unwanted, speak to your doctor or consider contacting an independent organisation who specialise in this area about options available to you.

Take control of the things you can and learn to let go of the things you can't – you can't control how other people behave but you can control how you respond to it. Talk to friends and family if you can, if not surround yourself with people who will support you; keep your healthcare team up to speed on how you feel. Receive offers of help, don't be too proud or think you *should* cope (remember challenge your negative thinking and what you think you know). Recognise when you need help. Only *you* can help yourself, others can't do this for you – but don't be afraid to reach out.

Links of Interest

Websites for other organisations

Links of Interest

Please note that we do not endorse these sites or their content, just that you may find them of interest.

www.maternityaction.org.uk

Promotes the rights, health & wellbeing of pregnant women

www.mind.org.uk

Association for Better Mental Health

www.bacp.co.uk

Find a therapist near you with the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy

www.ocdaction.org.uk

Help for those who recognise the symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder

www.relate.org.uk

Relationship counselling service

Disclaimer

and Copyright - Notes about this booklet

Disclaimer

The information provided in this booklet should never be taken as a substitute for professional advice. If you have any concerns or questions about your health and well being you must always consult a doctor or suitable medical professional for advice.

No responsibility is accepted by or on behalf of Positively Pregnant for any errors, omission, or potentially misleading statements on these pages regardless of provider. No mention of any organisation, company or individual, on these pages shall imply any approval or warranty as to the standing or capability of any such organisations, company or individual on the part of Positively Pregnant.

Whilst every attempt has been made to ensure the information contained in this booklet is complete, accurate and comes from reliable sources, no guarantee of its correctness or applicability to any given situation is provided. Positively Pregnant will not accept responsibility or liability for any loss or damage incurred as a result of relying on information contained in this document.

Copyright

You are not entitled to copy, modify, publish or distribute this material in any way without express permission from the Author. Any unauthorised use, copying, modification or distribution of this material, or any attempt to alter or misuse content is expressly forbidden. © Delphi Ellis, Positively Pregnant/Karma Living 2011