



**March e-newsletter, 2009**

**Topics: Great Expectations & Pregnancy Myth Busters**

## **Great Expectations**

Pregnancy and parenthood is all about hope and expectations. From the moment the plus sign appears, your mind begins to wander and your body begins to change. Of course you are prepared for the growing belly and the obvious changes that come with pregnancy, but there may be many changes you may not expect. This month we will discuss some of the more unexpected parts of growing, birthing and raising a baby.

### **First Trimester**

The most common complaint in the first trimester is “morning sickness”...or for some, all day sickness. If morning sickness gets the better of you, be sure to keep something in your tummy at all times. An empty stomach tends to correlate with increased nausea. High protein snacks like raw almonds, sliced turkey or cheese are slower to digest and help combat the waves of nausea. Fatigue and mood swings are also common in the first trimester. Both can be addressed by keeping a regular schedule including 8-9 hours of sleep each night and a short nap each afternoon. If you feel mood swings coming on, don't be afraid to take a time out for yourself. Your hormones are rising to levels your body has never seen before, a little quiet time or a warm bath can go a long way towards calming yourself down. Growing a baby takes a toll on your body and you need your rest to keep both healthy and happy!

### **Second Trimester**

It's amazing how a tiny person the size of your fist can cause so many changes in your body. The good news is that the second trimester has come and you begin to feel more energy and excitement about the pregnancy. It is common to begin to feel those flutters of fetal movement around 20 weeks. This movement can be irregular in the beginning, you might feel it a lot one day, and nothing the next. If you are concerned, drink a glass of juice and lay down. Chances are that will stimulate the baby to kick away. By 28 weeks the movement becomes more regular and predictable.

Some of the less pleasant sides of the second trimester include heartburn, hemorrhoids and constipation. Heartburn is caused by the increased pressure of the growing uterus which pushes stomach acid up into the esophagus. The result is an acidy, burning feeling in the throat. This can be treated with small, frequent, non-spicy meals, drinking liquids at room temperature (separate from meals), as well as remaining upright for a couple hours after your meals. Additionally, you can take papaya enzymes (found in most health food stores) when bouts of heartburn are really bothersome. As for the hemorrhoids and constipation, it is important to take in plenty of water and high fiber foods and never strain on the toilet. To make life a little easier, elevate your feet on a shoebox when using the bathroom...it really does work!

### **Third Trimester**

As your pregnancy nears an end, comfort becomes more difficult. Your uterus begins to prepare for labor by having frequent “practice contractions” called Braxton-Hicks contractions. These contractions are useful in toning the uterus for the big day. Braxton-Hicks contractions feel like a hard tightening that may last a few seconds or as long as a few minutes. Although they can be uncomfortable, they are not usually painful. Be sure to notify your care provider if you are experiencing regular painful contractions.

Swelling, leg cramps and frequent urination are also common complaints in the third trimester. Swelling of the lower extremities is common and can be treated by increasing fluid intake, avoiding salty and processed foods, taking frequent rest breaks and elevating your feet. It is important to contact your care provider if you notice sudden swelling of the hands and face, especially if accompanied by a headache as this can be a sign of Preeclampsia.

Leg cramps often occur at night and are related to low levels of calcium and potassium. An easy way to combat those annoying wake up calls is to have a banana and yogurt late in the day or as a bedtime snack. As for the frequent urination...the weight of the baby on the bladder is the cause. It is essential that you don't give up your 8 glasses of water a day to help you stay out of the bathroom. When you do go, lift the bottom of your belly and sit there a few more seconds. Often you will be able to empty your bladder a little more completely and buy yourself an extra 20 minutes before your next bathroom visit.

### **Birth Day**

Over the past nine months you have planned, prepared, dreamed and hoped for the “perfect” (and painless) birth. Whether natural or medicated, vaginal or cesarean it is important to focus on the big picture...a healthy mom and a healthy baby! Regardless of all the expectations you had in mind for how this day would unfold for you—it is important to remain flexible and focused on a safe and healthy delivery. If you don't get the birth day you hoped for, please don't allow your disappointment to get in the way of your excitement and bonding with your new baby. Take time to grieve the loss of your perfect birth and then move on and celebrate the new life you have created and enjoy every second of your new found mommy hood!

### **Motherhood**

As you move from preggo to full-time mommy, flexibility remains the name of the game. New mothers might have an idea of what to expect but the reality is that most babies do not come into the world on a schedule, nor do they typically sleep 8 hours at night. Sore nipples, sleepless nights and diaper duty can zap your energy in no time. It is essential that you continue to take care of yourself, remember that you are recovering from the rigors of childbirth and caring for a new baby. Only attend to the most essential tasks and resolve to put people before things. Housecleaning and laundry can wait (the baby will never know the difference). Make sure you are eating, drinking and resting whenever possible, and make time to nurture your relationship with your partner...you need each other now, more than ever!

## **Baby Blues**

Most women don't expect that postpartum depression will happen to them so when it does, they are caught off guard. Even the most calm, prepared and happiest person can't escape the possibility of experiencing postpartum depression (also known as the "Baby Blues"). For some, it is short-lived. For others it can linger on or doesn't happen at all. In the event it happens to you, it's best to be informed on the matter.

What is postpartum depression? Following the birth of your child, your body's hormone levels dip significantly. The physical changes in your body also contribute—your body rapidly switches from carrying and growing a baby to nurturing it (by way of breastfeeding). Beyond this, you are exhausted from childbirth, lack of sleep and the new level of responsibility a newborn baby brings to your life. All of these things happening at once can be traumatic. Symptoms of the baby blues are feeling abnormally tired, hopeless and worthless. For me, I found myself crying a lot, feeling overwhelmed and just plain sad—more so in the first few weeks after delivery. I was not prepared to feel this way. I had skipped past all the chapters that discussed postpartum depression in my prenatal reading because I was confident that it wouldn't happen to me—but it did.

What to do about it? First off, know that it is entirely normal. Also know that it's perfectly fine to admit it to your friends, family and especially your care provider. There is no shame in it. In fact, you'll be surprised at how common it is—you are not alone! If you notice that your baby blues intensify, persist or impede your ability to care for your newborn you must inform your care provider immediately. There are many treatments to address these symptoms and they don't all require that you take pharmaceuticals. The important part is that you take steps to better yourself so that you can properly enjoy this very special time in yours and your newborn's life.

## **Juggling Act**

Whether you are a first-time mother or having your second or third child—each time presents new challenges. With new challenges you must learn to juggle added responsibilities with existing responsibilities. If you set the expectation for yourself to manage everything on your own, you might end up feeling overwhelmed and just plain exhausted. Here are some helpful tips to consider:

For me, beyond caring for my child, having a clean house was important. To keep my sanity, I ended up hiring a maid to come to the house twice a month. If cost is an issue, look into having someone come only once a month, or someone to simply dust and vacuum or just clean the kitchen and/or the bathroom/s. Spending a few extra dollars each month to keep your sanity is well worth it.

If grocery shopping is a chore for you, look into having your groceries delivered! Many supermarkets offer online shopping and delivery to your front door. My problem with this is that I like to pick out my own produce. If you are like me, order staple foods online like bread, milk, eggs, cheese and cereal. Save the produce shopping for yourself. Doing so will cut down on time you spend in the grocery store and save your sanity.

If getting dinner on the table is a chore for you, visit your local Trader Joes. Every Trader Joes that I have visited has printed recipe cards/flyers in the front or back of the store. Every recipe consists of ingredients you either already have at home or can buy in your Trader Joes store. I find that their recipes are really tasty, healthy as well as quick and easy to make. It's a great alternative to cooking up mac & cheese from a box, ordering pizza or getting take-out. Don't sacrifice nutrition for convenience.

If laundry is a sore spot—stagger it. Do smaller loads more frequently. Another option is to share the burden with your husband. Maybe set it up so that you do the laundry for the children and he does laundry for you and him? Or vice versa.

The important thing is that you take steps to minimize the level of stress in your life so that you can fully enjoy parenthood. After all, this is an amazing time of celebration, discovery, hope and expectations. Embrace the journey!

## Pregnancy Myth Busters

Many myths and old wives tales surround pregnancy. Here are 10 common myths busted!!!

- 1. The shape of your belly determines the sex of your baby**  
You have likely heard that if you are carrying small and high it's a boy and low and wide you are sure to have a girl. In actuality, the way you carry your precious bundle is determined by your body structure and muscle tone as well as the position your baby is in.
- 2. The baby's heart rate determines the sex of your baby**  
The word on the street is if your baby has a heart rate greater than 140, paint the nursery pink, less than 140, go for blue. However, the average heart rate of a fetus is 120-160. The heart rate is more accurately determined by the age and activity level of the baby at the time it is measured, not the sex of the baby. The only accurate way to determine the sex of the baby prior to delivery is an amniocentesis or a high resolution ultrasound.
- 3. Sex during pregnancy will harm the baby**  
Although there are some valid medical reasons to avoid sexual activity during pregnancy, in most cases sex is not harmful to the baby and can be very enjoyable for the couple. If you have any questions be sure to check with your care provider.
- 4. If you raise your arms above your head you will tangle the baby in the umbilical cord**  
Up to 30% of all babies are born with the umbilical cord wrapped around the neck, leg, or shoulder, sometimes the cord even gets tied into a knot! However, this has nothing to do with putting your arms over your head. The cord is affected by the activity level of the baby and the length of the umbilical cord.
- 5. Baths during pregnancy aren't safe**  
Actually a warm bath can be a wonderful treat and help to relax and soothe tired muscles or an aching back. Keep the water warm, not hot and be sure you have help getting in and out of the tub once your belly begins to expand—as your ability to balance yourself is compromised.
- 6. You can't color your hair during pregnancy**

You do not have to resign yourself to hideous hair during pregnancy. Studies have shown that painted on highlights are perfectly safe in pregnancy as long as there are no open abrasions on the scalp.

**7. If you have heartburn your baby will be born with a full head of hair**

Heartburn is a common complaint of pregnancy and related to the pressure of the growing belly on the stomach. The amount of hair your baby has is related to genetics and is determined long before you suffer the effects of heartburn.

**8. If you have acne you are carrying a girl**

The word on the street is that if you have breakouts your baby is a girl and she is stealing your beauty. This could not be further from the truth! Breakouts are caused by the hormonal fluctuations of pregnancy caused by both boy and girl babies.

**9. You can't get pregnant while you are breastfeeding**

While breastfeeding may delay ovulation and your period, you can still get pregnant. You won't get your first period post-baby until two weeks after you ovulate. So you will release an egg before you get your first period. I know plenty of moms (myself included) who will gladly debunk this theory!

**10. During delivery it is better to cut than tear**

This myth refers to having an episiotomy at the time of birth. The term "tearing" conjures up images that most women would rather not consider. Actually, tears often are small and do not extend into the muscle. When an episiotomy is cut, several layers of tissue and muscle are cut. Tears also tend to heal more comfortably than episiotomies. To prevent lacerations, it is important to listen to your care provider carefully and to give small controlled pushes to allow the tissues to stretch. If the baby shows signs of distress, an episiotomy will generally be cut. But research has demonstrated that the highest incidence of rectal sphincter and rectal lacerations occurs when an episiotomy has been cut.

**Resources:**

Learn more about post partum depression: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/depression-pregnancy.cfm>

Need help cleaning the house? Try Merry Maids! <http://www.merrymaids.com/>

Make easy home cooked meals. Find your local Trader Joes store:

<http://www.traderjoes.com/locations.asp>

Save time. Buy groceries online:

<http://shop.safeway.com/superstore/default.asp?brandid=2&page=corphome>

**Questions?**

Contact Nurse Wendy!

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