Pregnancy and Depression

Pre-reading
Questions: What do I know about this subject? What would you like to know?
Definitions: Runs in some families – is hereditary; passed from parent to child

Reading

Depression can be described as feeling sad, blue, unhappy, or miserable. Most of us feel this way at one time or another for short periods. True clinical depression is a mood disorder in which feelings of sadness, loss, anger, or frustration interfere with everyday life for an extended time. Depression can be mild, moderate, or severe.

Researchers believe that depression is one of the most common complications during and after pregnancy. Often the depression is not recognized or treated because some normal pregnancy changes cause similar symptoms and are happening at the same time. Tiredness, problems sleeping, stronger emotional reactions and changes in body weight may occur during pregnancy and after pregnancy. These symptoms may also be signs of depression.

There may be a number of reasons why a woman gets depressed. Hormone changes or a stressful life event, such as a death in the family, can cause chemical changes in the brain that lead to depression. Depression is also an illness that runs in some families. Other times, it’s not clear what causes depression.

During pregnancy, these factors may increase a woman’s chance of depression: history of depression or substance abuse; family history of mental illness; little support from family and friends; marital or financial problems; young age (of mother).

After pregnancy hormonal changes in a woman’s body may trigger symptoms of depression. The amount of two female hormones, estrogen and progesterone, in a woman’s body increases greatly during pregnancy. In the first 24 hours after childbirth, the amount of these hormones rapidly drops back down to their normal non-pregnant levels. Researchers think the fast change in hormone levels may lead to depression, just as smaller changes in hormones can affect a woman’s mood before she gets her menstrual period.

Levels of thyroid hormones may also drop after giving birth. The thyroid is a small gland in the neck that helps to regulate your metabolism (how your body uses and stores energy from food). Low thyroid levels can cause symptoms of depression including depressed mood, decreased interest in things, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, sleep problems, and weight gain. A simple blood test can tell if this condition is causing a woman’s depression.

Any of these symptoms that last longer than two weeks are a sign of depression: feeling restless or irritable; feeling sad and overwhelmed; crying a lot; eating too little or too much; sleeping too little or too much; trouble focusing; feeling worthless or guilty; withdrawing from family and friends.

Women should speak to their doctor or midwife if they are having symptoms of depression while they are pregnant or after they deliver their baby. A doctor or midwife can help diagnose depression and provide women with helpful referrals.

Some other helpful tips to share with pregnant women and new moms are:

- Try to get as much rest has you can. Nap when the baby naps.
- Stop putting pressure on yourself to do everything. Ask for help with household chores and nighttime feedings.
- Talk to your husband, partner, family, and friends about how you are feeling.
- Don’t spend a lot of time alone. Get dressed and leave the house. Take a short walk.
- Talk with other mothers, so you learn from their experiences.

Source: The National Women’s Health Information Center – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Level 8.0
Understanding
1. What are some signs of depression? (List at least three.) ___________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
2. Why can depression be difficult to identify in pregnant women, or those who have recently given birth?
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
3. What hormones can affect depression? _______________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
4. How does depression differ from feeling sad or upset? ___________________________________________ 
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
5. What other events besides pregnancy can cause depression? _______________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
6. Who can diagnose depression? _______________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
7. Which moms-to-be or new moms are more likely to be depressed? _________________________________ 
   ____________________________________________________________

Writing
Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Write about someone you know who has been or is depressed.

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