

# Pregnancy and Depression



## Pre-reading

Questions: What do you know about this subject? What would you like to know?

Definitions: Runs in some families – is hereditary; passed from parent to child

## Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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