

Promoting Healthy Beginnings

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If you would like to contribute to our newsletter as a writer or with suggestions for future articles, please call, fax or e-mail the office.

Reducing Stress in Pregnancy—How You Can Help

Many women, upon first learning of their pregnancy, feel a wealth of emotions; excitement, joy, sadness, panic, etc. It can be overwhelming to think about all the things a new mom needs to know. Chronic stress can lead to trouble sleeping, headaches, loss of appetite, overeating, or high blood pressure. Fortunately, there are ways you can help mom reduce the amount of stress she may be experiencing.

Research shows stress before and during pregnancy is linked to poor birth outcomes as well as health issues for baby down the road. Reducing stress in mom's life can help her to sleep better, become more active, and make healthy food choices – all of which help mom to grow the healthiest baby possible.

According to the March of Dimes, “Women who experience high levels of stress during pregnancy have a 25-60% higher risk for preterm delivery, even after accounting for the effects of other established risk factors, compared to women with low levels of stress. Stress before and during pregnancy has been linked to low birthweight babies, regardless of preterm delivery. Increased maternal psychosocial stress is associated with vascular disorders, such as hypertension and preeclampsia, which are major medical reasons for preterm delivery. These conditions are most common for women who are African American, older, or in first-time pregnancies.”

Pregnancy brings physical discomfort, changing hormones, worries about labor and delivery, and the need to manage work responsibilities within the changing environment. All of this is normal and there are several things you can instruct mom to do to ease her stress and tension.

- **Inform mom that discomfort is inevitable in pregnancy.** Back pain, joint pain, etc. can put stress on her body; however let her know that it is temporary and should stop after pregnancy. Pregnancy Yoga can be great in soothing some of that pain. There are many pregnancy yoga videos on YouTube she can follow along with right from her living room.
- **Worrying about labor and delivery well before her due date** can cause a lot of added stress. To manage this, help mom create a birth plan for the big day. For many people, having a plan and knowing that things are taken care of can relieve a lot of stress. However, remind her that even though this birth plan is in place, it has the chance of going out the window due to unseen complications.
- **Encourage her to manage her work responsibilities.** She may need to talk to her employer well beforehand about what she expects as she goes back to work. This might mean more breaks, longer breaks, using a private area/nursing room to breastfeed, and other issues.

Reducing Stress (continued)

•**Help her manage her reaction to stress.** Stress can cause many people to turn to drugs and alcohol to relax. If you can figure out what's causing her stress, you can help plan how she reacts. Relaxation techniques and meditation can help with this.

•**Remind her it's OK to ask for help!** No one is expected to do it all, especially during pregnancy! Having a support network to ask for help with household chores and/or meal preparation will decrease her stress.

•**If she appears depressed, talk to her.** You may need to refer her to a mental health professional that has experience with depression during pregnancy. In Utica, the Samaritan Center has counselors that are trained in Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders. Call (315) 724-5173 to schedule an appointment.
Sources: March of Dimes, NICHD

Shaken Baby Syndrome

Shaken Baby Syndrome occurs when a person violently shakes a baby or small child, causing the head to move back and forth or side to side, injuring the baby or child.

When a baby is shaken, the brain moves around inside the baby's skull and destroys or injures brain tissue, which can cause tearing and bleeding in the brain and skull.

Most of the time, a baby is shaken because the person caring for them is frustrated or angry. Babies may cry more than expected, and oftentimes do not stop crying for hours. This can cause anyone to become frustrated and angry. Sometimes, it is unclear what's wrong with the baby. Some may feel they are a bad parent, bothering people, or are having problems toilet training or feeding. Most people who have shaken babies never intended to hurt the baby, and did not realize the consequences of their actions. This can be avoided by simply having an open and honest conversation about what to do when a child won't stop crying.

First, encourage the caregiver to ensure all basic needs are met.

- Does the diaper need to be changed?
- Is baby hungry or thirsty?
- Need to be burped?
- Too hot or too cold?
- Bored or lonely?
- Sick?
- In pain?

These simple troubleshooting steps may ease whatever fussiness baby may be experiencing and help to calm them down. However, if those needs are all met but crying continues, **encourage the caregiver to try any of the following options:**

- Stay calm – babies can sense tension
- Hold baby close and breath slowly and calmly
- Gently walk, dance or rock with baby
- Take baby for a ride in a stroller or car
- Turn on music, run the vacuum or dryer (babies enjoy consistent rhythmic noise)
- Gently massage baby.

If none of these techniques work, remind the caregiver that it is perfectly okay to put the baby down in a safe environment such as a crib or bassinet and walk away to take a break. Just make sure they know to check on baby every 10-15 minutes to be sure they are still safe. The baby might even fall asleep!

Lastly, support mom in her struggle by making sure she knows it's okay to ask for help. Encourage her to identify a few trusted friends or family members she can call upon should she ever be at a breaking point.

For more information on how to soothe a crying baby, check out Dr. Harvey Karp's Happiest Baby on the Block DVD from MVPN's Resource Lending Library!

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics, World Health Organization, Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey

Getting Ready for Pregnancy

Becoming pregnant is a life-changing event. Helping women plan and prepare for this special time in their lives is a crucial step toward keeping mom and baby healthy and happy. Women may become overwhelmed with all the information they receive about pregnancy, not to mention all the advice given by friends and family. What can you do to help mom get ready for all the twists and turns pregnancy brings?

Be sure to address the following:

- Encourage her to use birth control until she is ready to become pregnant – Discuss the pros and cons of various options and help her select one she feels comfortable with.
- Offer smoking cessation resources if necessary, and advise as to the risks of drinking alcohol during pregnancy.
- Review her vaccination and medical screening history. Is she up-to-date?
- If she has a medical condition such as diabetes, anemia, high blood pressure, epilepsy, thyroid dysfunction, or a sexually transmitted infection, is it under control?
- Ask about family history for both her and her partner – Are there any special circumstances to take into consideration?
- Are there potential hazards in the home or workplace, such as exposure to chemicals or cat or rodent feces?
- If it is at all possible she could become pregnant, discuss the need for a prenatal vitamin containing folic acid.
- Discuss ways to improve overall health through proper nutrition, physical activity, good oral hygiene practices, and stress reduction.

- Additionally, ask her about her family planning goals:
 - How many children does she want?
 - How old does she want to be when she becomes pregnant?
 - How many years apart are children going to be?
 - When does she want to stop having children?

Bringing up these seemingly simple questions can encourage mom to set goals and plan in advance!

Does mom need additional help planning for baby?

There are many resources available. The woman's OB/GYN or Primary Care Provider can help her get the services she needs.

The Women's Health Center (St. Elizabeth Medical Center) may also be able to help. Located across the street from St. Elizabeth Medical Center, the Women's Health Center provides a variety of services to women that are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Contact them at (315)801-8317.

Good Oral Health = A Good Student

To be an effective student is to be a healthy student. And you can't be healthy without a healthy mouth. So why is oral health taking a backseat to other health concerns? The myth is that baby teeth will fall out anyway, and therefore don't need as much attention as adult teeth. Baby teeth are just as, if not more, important as adult teeth. These teeth hold the place for permanent teeth to come in. If the baby tooth is affected by caries and decay, there is a much higher chance that those permanent teeth will have damage as well when they come in, and may force other teeth to push together to fill the empty spot. These teeth also help us to speak. Try saying "Smile" without using your teeth. It's very difficult. Taking care of these teeth will prevent further embarrassment and distraction from learning. Imagine you are a child in school, who had to have a tooth pulled because of decay. You might feel embarrassed, distracted by how much pain you are in, and have a hard time eating. Not only will the lack of nutrition have an impact, but the anxiety, tiredness and irritability that

Our Mission

To improve birth outcomes and maternal, child and family health, facilitate collaboration among providers and community organizations and advocate for change

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come with pain will have a large impact on how that child interacts with their world. If a child can't eat properly, speak properly, or be confident in themselves, they will have a very hard time learning and being successful. Some children may show signs of decay in the way they act. Some will have a hard time sitting still, may touch the affected area often, or may seem distracted. Tooth pain often takes up a majority of our thoughts until it gets taken care of.

The good news is dental disease is preventable. Implementing oral health routines in our daycare centers and elementary schools can promote good oral health practices that may not have been discussed at home. Through the use of songs, dramatic play, toys and games, and art and science, there are many activities to incorporate into one's daily or weekly routine. By doing simple things like offering water at meal times, or having it available all day, we encourage children to drink more water and take care of their mouths (whether they realize that's what they're doing or not). It's empowering for kids to be able to make their own choices. Through education, we can provide the tools for them to make good decisions.

For more information or ideas on how to incorporate oral health into your practice, call Mohawk Valley Perinatal Network at (315) 732-4657.

Need some help implementing oral health routines with your preschoolers and families? Mohawk Valley Perinatal Network proudly offers the **Cavity Free Kids** curriculum.

Cavity Free Kids is a complete oral health curriculum designed to educate preschoolers and their families, with an additional curriculum specific to pregnant women, infants, and toddlers.

The curriculum was crafted by the Washington Dental Service Foundation and is evidence based.

Cavity Free Kids comes complete with all dental science, lesson plans, recommended circle time activities, table top activities, songs, patterns, and form letters to be sent home to parents—already translated into a variety of languages.

The curriculum offers activities to educate parents, sample newsletter articles, and a step by step guide to implementation.

To set up a training for you or your staff, contact Diane Schnier at (315) 732-4657 x222 or dschnier@newfamily.org.