

**How can I prevent the negative effects of stress?**

Here are some things you can do to reduce and help manage the stress you are experiencing:

**EAT A HEALTHY DIET.** Whole grains & fresh fruits and vegetables are some of the best foods you can eat in pregnancy.



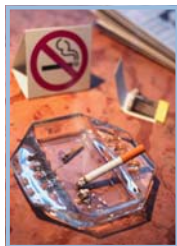
Eating well will give you the energy you need to get through the day. Your body needs a balanced diet to help you cope

with daily stress.

**GET PLENTY OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.**

Studies have shown that physical activity during pregnancy has benefits to both your mental and physical health. It can increase your energy level and gives you time to unwind after a rough day. Check with your care provider before beginning any kind of exercise program.

**DON'T TAKE RISKS.** Reduce your workload if you realize that you are doing too much. Get plenty of sleep. The less sleep you get the more stressed you are likely to be. Seek out alternative activities if you are craving cigarettes or alcohol. Try exercise, eating carrots, chewing gum - whatever works for you. Go to all your prenatal care appointments so you can make sure



your baby is developing normally.

**GET SUPPORT.** Not having a support system is one factor which can intensify stress. Talk to friends and family, join a support group, get counseling. It may seem impossible that seeking help can make you feel better, but reaching out to others can lessen some of the feelings caused by loneliness and isolation.



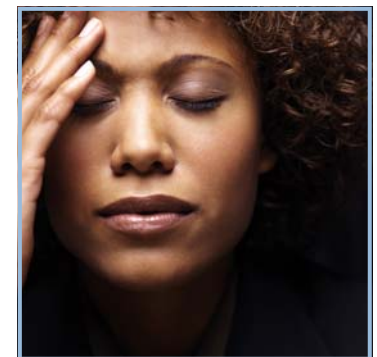
**PARTICIPATE IN RELAXING ACTIVITIES.**

Meditation, yoga and massage are all activities that have been found to lower stress and affect how your body responds to anxiety by lowering your heart rate and stress hormone levels. Each of these natural stress reduction techniques can help you focus, identify stressors and release stress in a healthy way.



# Stress & Pregnancy

Everyone experiences stress. But high levels of stress can be particularly harmful during pregnancy and may cause preterm birth and low birth weight. It is important for pregnant women to find ways to reduce stress and learn to cope with anxiety and other feelings involved with the pregnancy.



If you need additional information or help contact the Family Health Line at 1-800-451-BABY (2229)



Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade  
701 SW 27th Avenue • Suite 1401  
Miami, FL 33135

Phone: 305-541-0210 • Fax: 305-541-0213  
www.hscmd.org

Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade

## Research has shown that stress can be damaging to pregnant women and their unborn babies.

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Pregnancy is a unique time in the life of a woman and her family. Physical and emotional changes, as well as life changes, are all part of this special time.

Stress is how your body reacts to something that is out of the ordinary, to something dangerous, unknown or disturbing. Any change, even happy events, can cause stress.

Many things can cause stress and each stressor is not always negative.

When dealt with appropriately, stress can provide benefits. A woman, pregnant or otherwise, who is effectively dealing with the stress in her life, may feel invigorated rather than exhausted. If she is functioning well at work and at home, her stress level does not pose any health risks. However, when stress reaches uncomfortable levels it can be harmful.



### How do I know if my stress level is high?

Although some stress can be healthy, being under too much stress over time can affect your health and well being. Stress can increase the risk for developing health complications like low immune system response, heart disease, high blood pressure and depression. Stress can also make existing medical problems worse. Fatigue, sleeplessness, anxiety, poor



appetite, headaches, sleeping too much and overeating may indicate that your stress level is overly high.

### What happens when you are stressed?

The placenta often serves as a barrier between mom and baby. When you are stressed, the body produces excess amounts of a hormone called cortisol. The placenta has the ability to get rid of a certain amount of cortisol, so the baby is not affected. But once the placenta has reached its limit the excess cortisol is released

*Stress > Mother > Placenta > Baby*

into the amniotic fluid where it reaches the baby. Chronic stress is one of the situations which can result in the placenta not functioning properly. It can also reduce the ability of the immune system to respond and can indirectly cause maternal under nutrition. All of these ultimately have an effect on the baby's development and can put pregnant women at increased risk for pre-term labor.

### What are some stressful factors faced by at-risk women?

Some of the physical and psychological stressors that women face before and during pregnancy include:

#### Finances

- Do you have health insurance or access to

healthcare?

- Can you handle the increased expenses or medical bills you may be facing once the baby is born?

- Are you currently unemployed?

- Are you worried about having sufficient financial support?



#### Work

- Do you have a physically demanding job which includes prolonged standing, shift or night work and causes fatigue?

- What is the maximum length of maternity leave time allowed by your employer?

- Will you have a job waiting for you after you're ready to return from maternity leave?

#### Social Network of Support

- Are you married?

- Is the father involved in the pregnancy?

- Will he be involved after the baby's birth?

- Do you have any other children?

- Do you feel safe in your home?

- Does your family live nearby? Can you count on any family support to help raise your child?

### Where can I get help?

When does stress become distress? It is important to seek help before your stress becomes unmanageable. Contact your prenatal care provider, mental health professionals, clinic or clergy for support. They can help you find resources to deal with stress and its effects.