

Sharing Your Feelings

Pregnancy is a time of growth and change. Your body is changing and your feelings change along with it.

You may find that your feelings change so often—and sometimes so quickly—that you feel as if you are on an emotional roller coaster. One minute you're up, and the next you're down.

These mood changes can be surprising and unsettling, but they're normal. They are a natural response to all the changes that come with pregnancy.

You don't need medicine to get through this. You need time, patience, love, and support. Ask the people around you for the help you need. Talk about your fears, your worries, and concerns. Share your dreams and plans. If you need a hug or a back rub or a shoulder to cry on, ask for it. No matter how much people care about you and want to help, they can't read your mind. They won't know what you need unless you tell them.

Pregnancy is a normal part of life. But it's a time when your life is changing, and change—even a happy, welcome change—can bring stress.

There's a lot to think about while you're pregnant. What will childbirth be like? Will your baby be healthy? Will you be a good mother? A good father? Will you have to move to a bigger place? Can you afford it?

Don't let things build up. Talk about your worries and take care of problems while they are still small.

Pregnancy can bring people closer together than ever before. Talk things over with the ones you love.

Communication is important now, while you're pregnant. It will become even more important later, when you're getting adjusted to life with a new baby. You can't assume that you and your partner have the same ideas about parenting. For example, what do you think is more important—a happy baby or a clean house? What does your partner think? How do each of you plan to divide up the work of caring for a baby, doing housework, and earning a living?

Talk It Over



Another thing you need to discuss is how you plan to feed your baby. Did you know that breastfeeding has many advantages? It's the safe, natural way to feed your baby. Breast milk is the perfect food for babies, designed by nature to meet their needs and to give them protection from disease and infection. See the Breastfeeding Your Baby section of this book for more information.

Talk over how you plan to feed your baby with the important people in your life—your partner, your mother, your family, and your doctor. You will need help and support as you learn to be a parent and these are the people you will be depending on. Make them part of your plan.

You need to start talking about these things now. Don't wait until you have a problem to start sharing your feelings.

If you find you need help, ask for it. You can handle most things by talking them over with people you trust and working them out on your own. Sometimes though, it's just too much for one person. If this happens, and you feel overwhelmed by problems, look for professional help or counselling.

Abuse in Pregnancy

Violence against women is a widespread problem. Abuse can happen at any time, but it often starts—or gets worse—during and soon after pregnancy. Abused women are three times more likely to be injured during pregnancy or to have an abortion or miscarriage. Abused pregnant women are more likely to have a baby who is born too early or too small.

Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, or financial.

It is abuse if anyone:

- scares or threatens you
- yells at you
- calls you names
- hits or hurts you physically
- throws or breaks things
- stops you from seeing your family or friends
- demands sex
- questions everything you do
- tries to control everything you do
- controls all the money and the family finances
- tells you the abuse is your fault
- threatens to hurt or kill people or pets you care about

If you are being abused, you may feel afraid. You may feel helpless and worthless. You may feel like a failure. You may think that it's all your fault. These feelings can make it hard to look for help.

If you are being abused, you should know:

- The abuse is NEVER your fault. You do NOT deserve it.
- NO ONE has the right to abuse you.
- Children are hurt by seeing or hearing abuse in their family. This is true even if they are not physically abused themselves.
- Physical and sexual assault are crimes. It is also a crime to threaten physical or sexual abuse.
- You are not alone. There are people who can help you.

If you are being abused, you will need help and support to work out what you want to do. Talking to someone you trust is a good first step.

You can also look for help and support in your community. Try:

- women's shelters, transition houses, women's centres
- help lines
- police
- support groups
- domestic abuse intervention programs for men
- legal aid
- counseling services
- clergy
- medical services

Whatever you decide to do, your safety and your children's safety are what matter most.

You'll find more information about what to do if you are being abused in **Making Changes**, a booklet from the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. You can get a copy from your local family resource centre or Public Health Services office.

Sexuality

Your sexuality is part of who you are. As your life, body, and feelings change with pregnancy so will your sexual feelings and desires.

Is It Safe to Have Sex During Pregnancy?

In a healthy pregnancy, sex won't hurt the baby and won't hurt the mother. Most of the time it's perfectly safe and normal.

However, your doctor may advise you to avoid intercourse

- if your placenta is attached in the lower part of your uterus, near your cervix (placenta previa)
- if, in the past, you have had a problem with your cervix starting to open up too early in your pregnancy (incompetent cervix)
- if you have a history of unexplained early labour
- if you have any signs that you might be going into labour too early
- if you have any signs that you might miscarry
- if your waters have broken
- if you have an infection

If your doctor has advised you to avoid intercourse, don't forget to ask him or her when you can start again.

Sexual Feelings

It's normal for your sexual feelings—and your partner's—to change while you're pregnant. A lot of things can influence how you feel about sex. For example, you and your partner can both have mixed feelings about the changes in your body that come with pregnancy. Many men and women think that a pregnant woman's larger breasts and rounded tummy are sexy and exciting. Others don't. You may find that your own feelings about your body change from day to day.

Almost any pattern of interest in sex is normal. Many pregnant women find that they are more sensitive to touch and more easily aroused. Others find it more difficult to enjoy sex at this time.

The most important thing is to talk to one another, to try to understand each other's feelings and concerns.

As your size and shape change, you can enjoy looking for different and more comfortable positions. This is a great time to experiment. Let your partner know what feels good and what doesn't and return the favour. The important thing is to tell each other how you feel.

Remember that there are many ways to show love, care, and affection that don't involve sexual intercourse. If either you or your partner don't want intercourse, look for other ways to be close. Try massage, cuddling, kissing, back rubs. Pregnant women often feel a great need to be held and cuddled. Their partners seem to like it, too.



Take Time for Yourself

Take care of yourself

Enjoy your pregnancy and remember that you're worth fussing over. Taking care of yourself is good practice for taking care of your baby.

Give yourself a break:

- Make some time for yourself every day. Stretch out, relax, and think about your baby.
- Give yourself a day off once in a while. Read, swim, walk, or just spend the day in bed.

Stay active:

- Make time every day for physical activity. Walking, swimming—even just stretching—will help you feel better when stress builds up.

Relax:

- Lie down, relax your muscles, and concentrate on breathing slowly and deeply.
- Do some of the relaxation exercises in the Healthy Activity section every day.



Public Health Services

www.gov.ns.ca/hpp

