

**Controlling Stress In Pregnancy**

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By Katie Young**

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| Dr. Brad Sakaguchi |

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**One of the first things people told me when I got pregnant was to relax - don’t stress.**

**“Stress is bad for the baby,” they’d say.**

**Well, if you’ve ever been pregnant, you’d know that stress and worry come with the territory, especially if you’re a first-time mom.**

**You have anxiety about miscarriage, gestational diabetes and potential birth defects. You have concerns about whether you’re eating right and sleeping in the best position to aid with blood circulation to the fetus. Once you start feeling the baby move, you wonder if it is moving enough or in the right ways.**

**You can’t help but worry about this new life growing inside of you. And when people tell you to relax and not stress out ... well, it makes you worry about how much you’re worrying. But how harmful is your stress, really, on you and your unborn child?**

**According to Brad Sakaguchi, M.D., Honolulu OB/GYN and owner of the ZenSpa & Medical Offices in Restaurant Row, the most common question pregnant women ask is, “How does stress affect the baby?”**

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**“Early in my career I found this puzzling,” says Sakaguchi. “I wasn’t sure what these women meant by stress, but even more puzzling was that stress in pregnancy was never covered in my medical training.”**

**Sakaguchi thought women were talking about situations of great stress such as a divorce or death in the family, but usually this wasn’t the case. Women were concerned about the day-to-day stress that many of us encounter.**

**“The basis for this is probably patients’ basic understanding that chronic stress affects our entire health and well-being. Therefore it would stand to reason that it could also affect the health of the pregnancy or baby,” explains Sakaguchi.**

**But the little research that has been done on the subject has primarily concentrated on severe stress in pregnancy such as war, natural disasters and famine, he says. Most early pregnancy miscarriages can be attributed to lack of prenatal care, poor maternal nutrition and loss of usual social support networks.**

**The question remains, however, outside of such extreme situations, can stress alone cause pregnancy complications?**

**“Cortisol is a hormone released in higher amounts during periods of stress. Chronic elevations in cortisol have been associated with many other medical problems, including depression, hypertension and weight gain,” says Sakaguchi. “There is some evidence from small research studies that elevated cortisol levels from severe stress can be associated with early pregnancy loss.”**

**He says the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology advocates early screening for some psychosocial stressors.**

**“These stressors generally include smoking, homelessness, domestic abuse and drug abuse, which are known to have adverse affects on pregnancy.”**

**However, there are no indications for how daily stress affects pregnancy and babies.**

**“One problem may be that the term ‘stress’is so subjective,” says Sakaguchi. “It’s difficult to actually measure stress, and different people have carrying capacities to cope with their stress.”**

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**He adds that it makes sense that stress is not good and one should do everything within reason to reduce stress during pregnancy.**

**“Stress probably does have at least an indirect effect on the pregnancy,” he explains. “It can increase blood pressure over a short time, lead to too much or too little weight gain, increase the likelihood of drug use or smoking, and prevent regular prenatal care.”**

**Sakaguchi says pregnant women should take an active role in managing their stress. His top 10 tips for reducing stress during pregnancy include:**

**Write down a list of things that cause you stress.**

**Decide which of those things you can change or eliminate, then do it!**

**Seek out support from your family, friends, church or pregnancy support groups. \* Keep a regular sleep cycle. \* Exercise (with your doctor’s permission.) \* Treat yourself to a massage, facial or pedicure \* Eat right. Avoid refined sugars and fatty foods. \* Try meditation. This can lessen anxiety and lower blood pressure. \* See your doctor regularly for prenatal care. \* Talk to your doctor, clinical psychologist, therapist or counselor if you are feeling overwhelmed.**

**Some amount of worry is normal, I think. After all, this is a new, exciting, scary and overwhelming time in your life - one that carries with it an enormous amount of responsibility.**

**But don’t let worry and stress take over. Instead, focus on your health and what makes you happy. Your baby will be just fine.**

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