

Depression during pregnancy is real. Read the signs and act

# Dark side of pregnancy



**TRIGGER POINT:** Depression in pregnancy is caused due to hormonal changes that can affect the chemicals in the brain

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**A**CCORDING to statistics, about 14 to 23 per cent of women show some signs of depression during pregnancy. While pregnancy is a beautiful phase for every woman, it can also generate emotions such as confusion, fear and stress in women. Another factor associated with pregnancy is depression. While a lot of the other emotions may be a result of hormonal imbalances, the same cannot be said to be true of depression. A misdiagnosis can prove dangerous for mother and child.

Depression in pregnancy is caused due to hormonal changes that can affect the chemicals in the brain. Pregnancy and the associated stress can cause an alteration in these chemicals leading to depression and anxiety. This condition is also known as antepartum depression. Some symptoms include prolonged sadness and anxiety, sleep problems, loss of interest in daily activities, thoughts of hopelessness, and decreased appetite.

## **The triggers**

There are many factors that can trigger depression in pregnancy. These could be family or personal history of depression, previous miscarriages, pregnancy-related stress and anxiety, complicated pregnancy, etc. Provided the symptoms are diagnosed at the right time and treated, it can not only lead to problems in the mother but also premature births and developmental problems in infants.

## **What can you do?**

Before starting any medication, it is important to find out the severity of depression in the mother. Depending upon this, there are many treatment options, including looking for support groups, private psychotherapy, medication and light therapy. Severe cases may require medication but these should only be taken with proper guidance from the doctor. Research indicates that some anti-depressants have proven to be beneficial. Whatever the case may be,

it is a good idea to try and opt for some natural remedies and ways to cope with depression during pregnancy. Medication should always be taken in consultation with your doctor.

## **Finally...**

The best way to fight pregnancy-related depression is to share these feelings with someone. Never try to face depression alone. Although research on depression during pregnancy is ongoing, it is imperative to recognise when a pregnant woman may be depressed and encourage her to seek treatment as soon as possible. Another thing that can be considered is to make screening for depression a part of routine antenatal checkups. This will ensure that women who are in need of intervention for possible depression are accorded treatment at the right time, thereby preventing adverse outcomes.

—The writer is director, Bloom IVF Group, and secretary general of the Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecological Societies of India