

Supporting Healthy Sleep During Pregnancy

Why is Sleep so Important in Pregnancy?

Common Sleep Complaints



- Takes a long time to fall asleep
- Waking up in the middle of the night with difficulty getting back to sleep
- Snoring
- Waking up gasping for air at night
- Restless legs and frequent tossing and turning
- Heartburn or reflux

Sleep impacts the health of both mother and baby. Studies show that long-term lack of sleep can impact the **immune system**, which can worsen pregnancy outcomes. Sleep also plays an important role in **decision-making, memory, mood, and ability to handle stress**. All of these functions are important when caring for a newborn baby. **Regular and adequate sleep** should be a top priority for all pregnant women.

Take Control

Lifestyle Medicine for Good Sleep During Pregnancy



Nutritious Eating

Eating **fiber-rich minimally processed plant foods** such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds and avoiding refined flour/refined sugar foods such as cakes, donuts, pastries and candy may improve sleep quality.

Avoiding high fat meals, or large meals close to bedtime may help with acid reflux symptoms at night. Avoiding caffeine consumption in the afternoon can also help improve sleep.



Physical Activity

Regular movement and physical activity during pregnancy can improve mood sleep and wellbeing. Walking, swimming and riding a stationary bike are all considered safe activities for most pregnant women. Aim for 30 minutes of activity on most days.



Social Connection

Talk to your doctor about pregnancy support groups. Connect with a community group that shares some of your interests and hobbies. Take time to connect with close family and friends.



Stress Management

Gentle breathing techniques and journaling can help calm your mind before sleep. If you are having difficulty managing worries or stress, reach out to your provider for support and/or referral.



Risks Associated with Poor Sleep Quality

- Weight gain
- Fatigue and sleepiness during daytime
- Reduced daytime function
- Gestational diabetes (high blood sugar)
- Preeclampsia
- Increased risk of low birth weight, C-section delivery, pre-term birth
- Sleep problems and crying in babies after birth
- Depression and anxiety in post-partum women

Risk Factors

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Obstructive Sleep Apnea in Pregnancy

What is OSA?

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) is when your breathing starts and stops while you sleep because your airway closes.

1

Among obese pregnant women, 15%-20% have OSA.

Pre-pregnancy obesity and pregnancy-related weight gain are risk factors.

2

Symptoms overlap common pregnancy symptoms, such as headaches, heartburn, and morning nausea, anxiety and depression, feeling tired, snoring, breathing pauses, shortness of breath in sleep or gasping for air in sleep.

3

OSA deprives the body of oxygen. This is very unhealthy for the mother and the unborn baby. OSA can increase your risk of high blood pressure, high blood sugar, gestational diabetes, and preeclampsia.



Healthy Sleep Behaviors

Keep your bedroom dark, quiet and at a cool temperature to improve sleep. Avoid screen time (tv, phone, iPad) before bed which may interfere with sleep.

Keep track of your sleep behaviors and patterns using a sleep log so you can determine what seems to work best for you.

Talk to Your Provider

Managing Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)

Maintaining a healthy weight helps reduce the risk and severity of OSA. Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy is a safe and effective way to manage OSA before, during and after pregnancy. Talk to a sleep specialist about CPAP therapy and good sleeping positions to make sure your body is getting enough oxygen during sleep.

Managing Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS)

- Soaking your legs in a warm bath or massaging them can help relax muscles and improve symptoms of RLS. Alternating warm and cool packs can also lessen the sensation for RLS. Consider using a foot wrap that is designed for RLS.
- Dark leafy greens such as kale, Swiss chard and spinach that are rich in iron, magnesium and folate may help with restless leg syndrome.
- Movement and stretching may also help reduce restless leg syndrome

Managing Insomnia

If you are experiencing insomnia, talk to your doctor about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for insomnia (CBT-i) which can help you identify thoughts and feelings that are associated with sleeplessness. Your provider may offer other ways to help improve your sleep.

Key Resource:

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/pregnancy>

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