

Parenting Revolution

Baby Edition

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ACTIVITY SHEET



There's no denying it, pregnancy will bring about a whole lot of changes physically, emotionally, and mentally. Not only is your body changing at an incredibly rapid pace, but you now face the reality and responsibility of nurturing another life. This can feel like a daunting task, and it's easy to let worry consume you during this pregnancy season. For this reason, in this session we'll examine ways to help your body, mind and emotions brace for impact.



OBJECTIVE SUMMARY

The session is designed to help you:

- (a) understand the potential impact pregnancy can have on your body, mind and mood
- (b) recognise warning signs to look out for
- (c) learn foundational principles to keeping yourself psychologically healthy throughout pregnancy

The Physical Impact

During pregnancy, your body's hormone system goes into overdrive in order to prepare the womb to support and nurture a growing baby. A pregnant woman's body produces more estrogen and progesterone than a non-pregnant woman does throughout her entire life. For many women, this can lead to some uncomfortable symptoms such as nausea, mood swings, alterations in smell and taste, fatigue, dizziness, and the list goes on. While you may not have much control over hormonal changes, you can control how you take care of yourself physically throughout pregnancy.

Growing a baby is exhausting, and self-care is vital. When it comes to physical health, there are three ways you can set your body and brain up for success:

DIET

Balanced Nutrition

As your unborn baby grows, it receives its nutrients from you. Therefore, it's important to maintain a balanced, healthy diet. This not only keeps you feeling good, but also your baby. Experts recommend a diet full of fruit, vegetables and protein, that's low in sugars, and trans/saturated fat. There are also a number of foods to avoid completely whilst pregnant, as they may be unsafe for yourself and/or your baby. Speak with your healthcare provider if you think you may need additional information or support in this area.

SLEEP

Diurnal Rhythm

Pregnancy can be an exhausting time, and most pregnant women find that they need more sleep than usual. However, it's not just quantity, it's also quality that counts (especially in the third trimester). Healthy sleep habits include: going to bed at the same time each night; getting 7-9 hours of sleep per night; reducing or eliminating electronics from the bedroom; avoiding eating and drinking too close to your bedtime; don't "watch the clock" when trying to fall asleep (or if you wake); and do something relaxing before bed (ie. bath).

EXERCISE

Regulate Stress

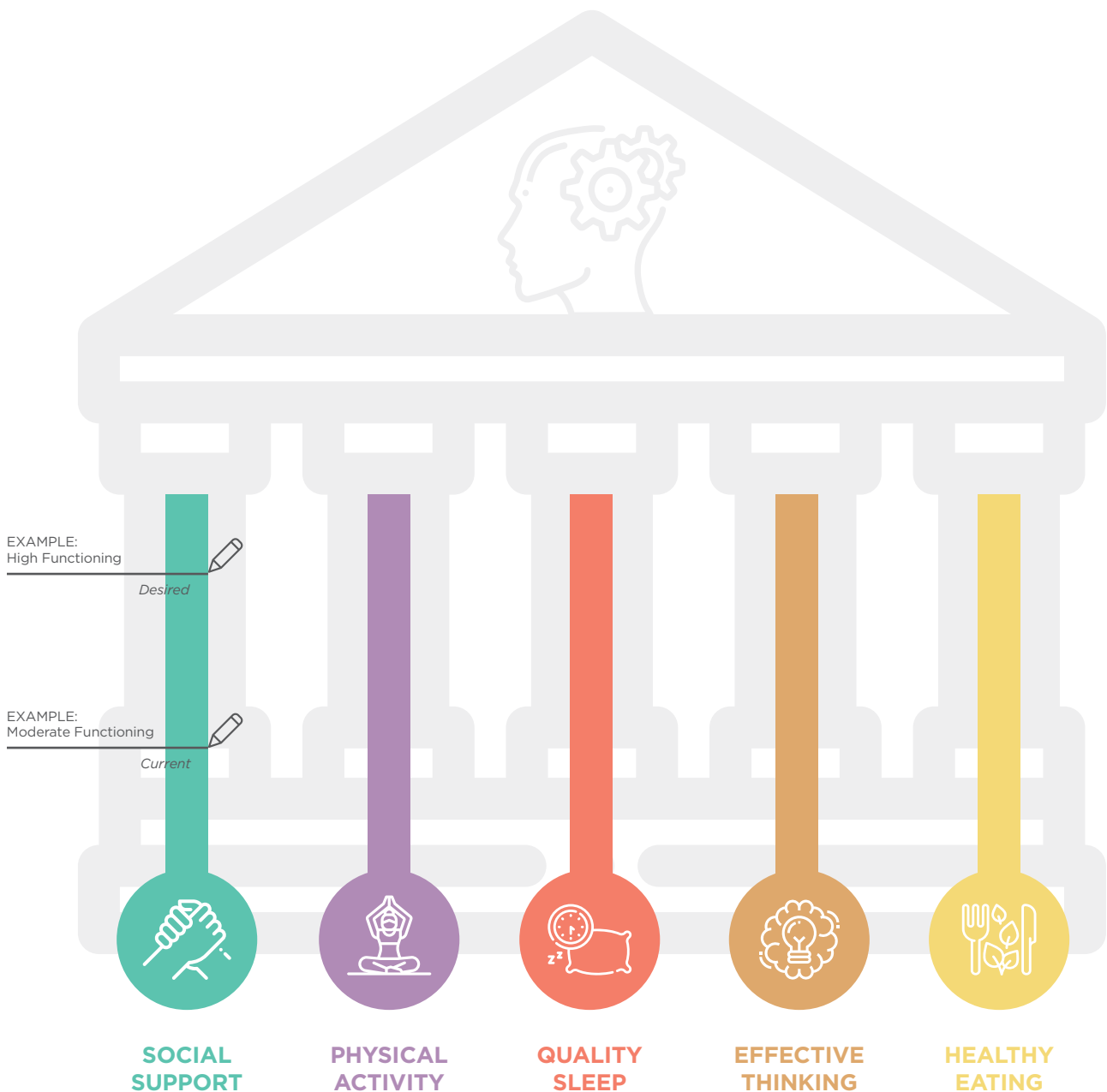
Doing regular physical activity throughout pregnancy is beneficial for your physical, mental and emotional health. Exercise can help to prepare your body for childbirth, as well as help regulate your stress hormones (cortisol) through the promotion and release of endorphins. Light to moderate exercise such as walking, swimming, or pregnancy pilates can give your body the movement it needs to stay healthy. As you expend energy, you cultivate more energy. However, it's important not to exhaust yourself.

The Psychological Impact

In addition to emotional highs and lows, during pregnancy it's common to experience mental fatigue, fog and forgetfulness. However, there are five foundational areas of your life that can profoundly influence your psychological well-being. These are more commonly known as the 5 pillars of mental health. If each foundational pillar is consistently strong, you're likely to remain mentally sharp and emotionally resilient. However, if these pillars are weak, you may be more vulnerable to the stressors and worries typically associated with pregnancy.

EXPECTANT MUMS:

Draw a line to indicate how well you think you're currently functioning in each of the foundational pillars. Then draw another line indicating the level of functioning you desire.



EXPECTANT MUMS:

Q: Which are your strongest foundational pillars for psychological wellbeing? Why?

Q: Which of the five foundational pillars for psychological wellbeing would you like to improve the most? Why?

Q: What simple things can you do each day that will help you strengthen your foundational pillars? *HINT: Start with small achievable steps*



NOTE: SEEK ASSISTANCE

If you're starting to experience a significant increase in worry, or a decrease in mood and self-esteem, the first and most important step is to seek extra support or professional assistance right away. The earlier you identify and address issues, the less likely they are to manifest into more serious concerns. There are some simple yet effective strategies which have been shown to improve mood and decrease anxiety. When people take these up as a daily habit, it can begin to change thinking patterns, which in turn will change the way you feel.

A pregnant woman with long dark hair, wearing a light blue floral dress, is shown from the waist up. She is looking down at her belly with a gentle expression. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene, possibly a beach or a field, with a warm, golden light suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

Giving your baby the best start in life, relates not only to your physical health, but also your mental, emotional and relational health.

MOST EXPECTANT MUMS EXPERIENCE EMOTIONAL HIGHS AND LOWS. HOWEVER, IF YOUR LOWS ARE TOO LOW, AND YOU FIND YOURSELF HAVING DIFFICULTY BOUNCING BACK, TALK TO A MEDICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL. LEFT UNCHECKED, LOW MOOD AND UNREMITTING SADNESS MAY LEAD TO PERINATAL DEPRESSION (MOOD DISORDERS EXPERIENCED BY 10% OF EXPECTANT MUMS IN THE PERIOD PRIOR TO AND AFTER BIRTH). THE GOOD NEWS IS, TREATMENT OPTIONS ARE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE - ESPECIALLY IF SYMPTOMS ARE IDENTIFIED AND STRATEGIES ARE IMPLEMENTED EARLY ON.

Dads, You're NOT Forgotten

Expectant mums aren't the only ones to experience the physical and psychological symptoms associated with pregnancy - so too do many expectant fathers! Couvade Syndrome (more commonly referred to as 'sympathetic pregnancy') is a phenomenon whereby a husband and wife's biology is synchronised in part - with expectant dads experiencing abdominal pain and bloating, back pain, lethargy, altered hormone levels, morning sickness (including vomiting), food cravings and weight gain around the midriff. However, by shoring up the foundations of physical and psychological wellbeing, husbands not only become better able to cope, they also become better positioned to support their wives.

EXPECTANT DADS:

Draw a line to indicate how well you think you're currently functioning in each of the foundational pillars. Then draw another line indicating the level of functioning you desire.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Current

Desired

EXAMPLE: Moderate Functioning

EXAMPLE: High Functioning

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

QUALITY SLEEP

EFFECTIVE THINKING

HEALTHY EATING

HEALTH CARE = SELF CARE

HUSBANDS: While you may be focused on your wife's physical, mental and emotional health, it's also important to be aware of how well YOU are coping.

EXPECTANT DADS:

Q: Which are your strongest foundational pillars for psychological wellbeing? Why?


Q: Which of the five foundational pillars for psychological wellbeing would you like to improve the most? Why?

Q: What simple things can you do each day that will help you strengthen your foundational pillars? *HINT: Start with small achievable steps*

5% OF EXPECTANT DADS EXPERIENCE ANXIETY AND/OR DEPRESSION DURING THE PREGNANCY PERIOD; WITH POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION IN MEN INCREASING TO 10% (FOLLOWING THE BIRTH OF THEIR BABY). RECOGNISE ANY EARLY WARNING SIGNS? IT'S WISE TO SEEK ASSISTANCE.

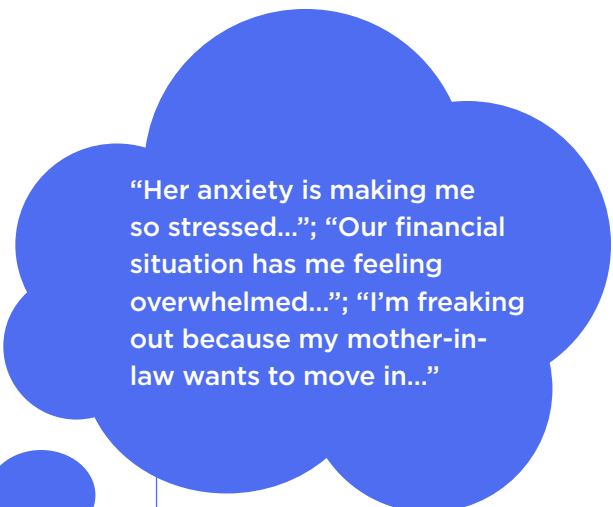
Master your Mind

People often believe that the way they feel is directly determined by the situation around them. However, the type and intensity of emotions you feel isn't actually determined by the situation, rather, by the way you mentally perceive and process the situation.



“This pregnancy is making me so anxious...”; “His lack of consideration and care makes me frustrated...”; “I’m relieved because my mum has offered to come support me...”

Rather than the pregnancy, her husband or her mother are regulating the expectant mother’s emotions. Her underlying automatic thoughts are what trigger emotional reactions (whether positive or negative).



“Her anxiety is making me so stressed...”; “Our financial situation has me feeling overwhelmed...”; “I’m freaking out because my mother-in-law wants to move in...”

His feelings are likewise triggered by underlying automatic thoughts. Becoming aware of these thoughts will, in turn, help him evaluate whether they’re true and helpful, or whether they need altering and replacing.

SITUATIONS



THOUGHTS



FEELINGS



ACTIONS

If the expectant mother was to stand back and ask **why** she believes the pregnancy is making her anxious, she may discover underlying automatic thoughts such as

- “I’m worried that something might go wrong”
- “What if I lose the baby?”
- “I don’t know if I can handle being a mother”

If the expectant father was to stand back and ask **why** he believes his wife’s anxiety is making him stressed, he may discover underlying automatic thoughts such as

- “I hate seeing her upset like this”
- “It’s wearisome listening to irrational concerns”
- “I don’t know how to help her when she’s feeling like this”

Once you’ve identified underlying automatic thoughts, test their accuracy and usefulness:

- What is the evidence for this thought?
- What is the evidence against this thought?
- What would I say to a friend if they were going through the same thing?

Thought Diary

Using a thought diary is a great way to identify and challenge any untrue or unhelpful thinking. When going through difficult periods, try keeping a thought diary each day. If you have trouble challenging your thoughts, ask your spouse or a friend to help. Often our loved ones are great at seeing things from a more accurate, balanced or constructive perspective. Why not try it out right now?

SITUATION / TRIGGER	FEELINGS	AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS	ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE	NEW FEELING & BEHAVIOUR
What was going on before you started feeling this way?	What emotions do you feel? What do you feel physically?	What is going through your mind? What are you saying to yourself?	Is there an alternative, more balanced way to think about this situation?	Does thinking differently change the way you feel. What can you do now?
EXAMPLE: Waiting at the doctor's office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious • Scared • Heart pounding • Sweaty palms • Jittery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hope the baby is okay? • What if the baby is not okay? • What if it's all my fault? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'm taking good care of myself and my baby." • "There's no evidence that anything's wrong." • "There's no need to jump to conclusions." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still a little nervous • Calmer than before • Take some controlled breaths • Thank God for His goodness

The Gratitude Lolly Jar

Research shows there are so many psychological benefits to be found in the practice of gratitude. Not only does it help pick you up when you're feeling down, but it also has long-lasting positive effects on the brain. Studies have found that gratitude can improve overall personal wellbeing, reduce your risk of depression and anxiety, enhance the quality of your sleep, and even improve your physical health! By choosing to re-direct your attention away from current challenges onto blessings, you're immediately reframing your perspective in that moment.



COUPLES ACTIVITY:

Follow the steps below to create your very own 'Gratitude Lolly Jar'. Despite the circumstances, when you are reminded of good things in your life, you're able to hijack your mind and take back control of your mood.

STEP 1: Make a list of the things you are grateful for in your life (enough to fill an entire sheet of paper). Type up and print out your list or handwrite each point down. Cut out the many points of gratitude into strips (or small pieces of paper).

STEP 2: Roll up the individual pieces of paper into small scrolls and tie them up with a piece of string. Alternatively, fold the small pieces of paper into small parcels. To take your 'Gratitude Lolly Jar' to a whole new level, buy a box of wrapped chocolates or lollies and bless your friends and family with them (however, ask them to save the wrappers for you). Wrap your small parcels using the chocolate or lolly wrappers.

STEP 3: Find a clear and transparent glass jar and place all your rolled, folded or wrapped points of gratitude into it. Whether you're facing times of emotional difficulty or wanting to pre-empt challenges by starting or finishing your day well, reach into the jar and take a 'lucky dip'. Whether together or on your own, regularly remind yourself of the things you're thankful for.

**“THE STRUGGLE
IS ARRESTED
WHEN GRATITUDE
IS ATTESTED”**