Sleep in Pregnancy

Pregnancy is an exciting and joyous experience for most women, but hormonal changes and the physical discomforts associated with carrying a child can lead to sleep disturbance. It is very common for women to feel fatigued during pregnancy, especially in the first and third trimesters.

With each trimester, new sleep challenges emerge. Results from a poll conducted by the National Sleep Foundation showed that 78% of women report more disturbed sleep during pregnancy than at other times.

A rise in progesterone levels for example can explain increased daytime sleepiness, especially in the first trimester. Hormonal changes can also affect the muscles, and can lead to snoring and an increased risk of developing sleep apnoea, particularly in women who were overweight when they became pregnant. Sleep apnoea is a condition where the walls of the throat relax and narrow during sleep, interrupting normal breathing during sleep. Frequent trips to the bathroom during the night can also disturb sleep.

A number of other sleep disorders, such as restless legs syndrome and gastroesophageal reflux disease can be caused, or made worse, by pregnancy.

Worrying about labour and delivery can also lead to insomnia, as women find it more difficult to switch off. This is especially true of first time mothers.

Getting a full night's sleep can become even harder when the baby arrives. So, it is especially important for pregnant women to develop strategies for coping with sleep problems to ensure that they are getting adequate sleep throughout their pregnancy.

www.sleepstation.org.uk is an online version of the therapy which our sleep doctors use in clinic to treat patients with insomnia. Sleepstation is available privately and via the NHS.
Tops Tips:

These tips may help, however, if your sleep disturbances is severe, consult your doctor to rule out any other cause.

1. Follow a bedtime routine to help you relax and wind down as bedtime approaches. Try taking a bath, reading in a dimly lit room or having a warm milky drink in the lead up to bedtime.

2. To prevent heartburn, make sure not to eat too close to bedtime and avoid fried foods as they may worsen symptoms. If heartburn is a problem for you, use an extra pillow to raise your head in bed.

3. Although daytime napping is usually best avoided, as it can lead to insomnia, during pregnancy it's important to sleep when you can. So, if you're not getting enough rest at night, take a nap to help reduce fatigue, even if only for 30-45 minutes.

4. Pillows can be used to support the belly and back. Placing a pillow between the legs, for example, can help support the lower back and make sleeping on your side easier. **Wedge-shaped pillows** are angled to support your bump when lying to relieve lower back ache and can also be used as feeding pillows after birth.

5. Relaxation techniques can help calm your mind and relax your muscles. Find something which works for you, and include it as part of your bedtime routine.

6. Regular exercise can promote physical and mental health and also improve circulation, helping to reduce nighttime leg cramps. However, vigorous exercise within four hours of bedtime should be avoided.

7. See your doctor for advice if insomnia persists.

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