

A Pregnant Pause

Written by Jennifer Barham-Floreani, DC

Tuesday, 01 December 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 31 October 2013 10:46

Pregnancy is obviously a time of great physical change in a woman's life, but take the time to honor the emotional journey as well.

Pregnancy is a transformative time in a woman's life, bringing about powerful physical, mental and emotional changes. The mind and body work together to form an intelligent organism in which every part affects the whole. Pregnancy is an ideal time to assess the quality of conversation that you have with yourself—and enhance it, if possible.

The brain has two parts that govern emotions and feelings: the limbic system (often called the seat of emotions) and the pre-frontal cortex (which regulates our feelings). Emotions are communicated to the body via the nervous system, which uses neurotransmitters to release chemicals that cause positive or negative physiological changes.



By Dr. Jennifer Barham-Floreani

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When we are stressed or anxious, for instance, our nervous system stimulates particular organs and glands to produce chemicals that put our body in a heightened state. While this is appropriate in certain situations, most of the time it's merely a conditioned response stemming from stress or anxiety. Sustained over a period of time, this chemical release can be detrimental to our health. Fear, tension and anxiety affect muscles, tendons and ligaments and can create imbalances (misalignments) in the spine, which in turn affect our nervous and immune systems. These chemicals can also cross the placental barrier and have a direct effect on the developing fetus.

Therefore, pregnant mothers must not only take care of themselves physically, but mentally as well. While unpleasant feelings are a natural part of life, it is wise to create calm thoughts as often as you can during gestation.

Of course, this is easier said than done. Some women feel sore all during the first trimester, which, if the symptoms continue throughout the pregnancy, can lead to severe physical and mental fatigue. Other women struggle most with the overwhelming emotions that pregnancy can engender. Expectant mothers may feel daunted by significant bodily changes: bigger breasts, a protruding belly and overall weight gain. Far from experiencing the "radiant glow" of pregnancy, these changes can leave women feeling grotesque and unloved.

Whatever feelings you have about your pregnancy, it is important to honour them. Acknowledge and express your negative emotions, and then balance these thoughts with positive visualization. In doing so, you enrich not only your birth experience, but your other relationships as well.

Releasing Negativity

On the surface it appears that pregnant women all experience a similar event. Deep down, however, each of us carries specific references from our past that create our own reality. Some references may be more traumatic than we expect. Address your uneasiness, if you feel safe to do so, and look to where these emotions are anchored.

Take a deep breath and try to relax. You might feel anxious about your capacity to parent, but remember that nothing in life happens by chance. You'll be amazed at the support available to you if you choose to meet through life with a positive and gracious attitude.

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When I was pregnant with our first child I tried to find women who had positive labour stories to tell me. Such women were few and far between. Over the years, having since spoken to hundreds of women, I've realised that it wasn't so much that their labours were horrific—it was more that the words they used to describe them were cries for acknowledgement. Labour is hard work, and it's a hell of a lot harder if you don't have the right support.

Before your labour, sit down with your birthing partner or a close friend or relative and write down the attributes of your ideal birth. Also write down your fears and concerns, so that you can discuss these with your midwife. Take time to discuss your partner's concerns as well, and clarify the role he or she would like to play during the birth.

It is important to acknowledge the references—your prior experiences, expectations and preconceptions—you both have around birthing. Discuss where these thoughts might have originated and whether they support your current birth choices. What actions do you need to take to feel differently, if necessary? Who can you speak with about them? What can you read?

Positive Visualisation

Visualisation is an extremely powerful tool for helping to access both your conscious and unconscious brain. In every aspect of our lives, we move in the direction of our most dominant thoughts. The repetition of this positive visualisation creates the opportunity for your brain to trust and believe those thoughts.

I found bath times to be wonderful opportunities for me to visualise each of our births. I

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visualised the birth in great detail: how the labour would begin, how I would feel and who would be there. Then I would think about second and third stages: seeing what my baby would look like, and imagining our first visitors. I would run the same positive images through my mind each night.

Visualisation can also reveal areas where you are feeling resistance or fear. As you imagine the scenario of your labour, notice anything that sparks negative feelings. Take the time to explore these feelings in greater detail. Ask yourself why you might be afraid of something, and what you could do to feel more supported or confident.

Visualisation can be even more effective when it is guided by a practitioner, such as a kinesiologist. Because our subconscious often hides the truth, protecting us from our deeper fears, sometimes a trusted person who can work with our energy patterns can help release blockages we might not even be aware of.

Chiropractic Care

Every thought that passes through our mind has a chemical consequence, just as the chemicals passing through the body affect our thoughts. This symbiotic relationship is facilitated by our nervous system, which carries messages from our brain to our body and back again.

Nerve dysfunction in the body can be a result of multiple stressors, including physical trauma (some from as far back as a person's birth), exposure to pollutants, chemical toxins in the body, inadequate diet and so on. We might not be consciously aware of nerve dysfunction. It can behave like an irritating noise in the background of our lives, subtly affecting our vitality and well-being, altering our moods and perception. Left unresolved, it can result in sickness or disease.

Chiropractic care is an excellent way to promote the balance between body and mind and naturally improve our mood. Correcting misalignments in the spine releases chemicals such as dopamine and certain endorphins, increasing our sense of well-being.

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Studies show that people receiving chiropractic care are less affected by stress, have more energy, think more clearly and have a greater quality of life.

Alongside chiropractic care, many other healthcare options are available to support and nurture your pregnancy. Taking the time to discover these wonderful, holistic practises is a way of turning your attention to the needs of your baby and body.

Focus on Your Baby

Your baby needs as much of your focus during your first trimester as it does in your last. Unfortunately, regardless of the countless pregnant sensations we have, many of us do not allow ourselves to really 'feel' pregnant until about 36 weeks in. Most of us have so many work and social commitments that we neglect self-care until those last few weeks. Yet unlike cramming for an exam, we can't cram good thoughts for our baby into the last few weeks of our pregnancy.

During pregnancy, allow yourself time to be still and connect with your baby. Allow your life to slow down. Consider activities you could refrain from—or could add to your day—that would give you time to sit and acknowledge your thoughts and feelings. Use this time to talk to your baby and really connect with him or her.

When you choose to be conscious of the magical events occurring within your body, pregnancy can indeed be a lifechanging event. Your thoughts and feelings play a pivotal role in shaping this experience, and the health of your mind is just as important as the health of your body. Your baby is receptive to all of your thoughts, positive and negative. The time you spend calming your mind and dealing with fears will prepare you for the journey of parenting that lies ahead.

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