



Coping With GDM and Stress

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So once you have an understanding of how you feel when you are stressed, take a step back and look at *what are your sources of stress*. It's helpful to keep a log for instance for a week. Either use your notepad on your smartphone or there's some good apps that can help you with that, but jot down what are the things in your environment. Or they could even be in your head because stressors don't have to just be something that's happening. It could just be something that you're worried about.

Jot those things down and look for common patterns. Is it finances that worry you? Is it interpersonal relationships with your family or friends or coworkers? Work is a big source of stress for people. So try to figure out what are the sources of stress and then take a step back and see what you can do about it. Which ones are avoidable? Which ones are things that you need to accept but perhaps learn some strategies to better cope with those stressors in your environment.

Complications that can occur during pregnancy such as getting a diagnosis of gestational diabetes can be very anxiety provoking for women. When you get the diagnosis first there's disbelief: "But I thought I was doing everything right. Why is this happening?" And then once that settles it's: "Okay what does this mean?" Women start to be concerned and worried about how it's going to affect the pregnancy, are they going to have a more complicated delivery, how will the baby be impacted. These are all common worries that women experience when they have a diagnosis.

Then it's the worry of following what they need to do in order to manage the condition: lifestyle changes, physical activity habits, healthy eating. They may be asked to take insulin or medication to control the blood sugar. So that becomes overwhelming as well.

These are all things that can be stressors but it's important in order to manage the anxiety to look at what aspects are within my control and what aspects are not within my control. Doing what your doctor has recommended to help better manage your condition are things that are within your control that can give you a sense or feeling of empowerment. Knowing that you are doing everything you can to get this under control.

Understanding GDM means asking your doctor for information. I know sometimes you feel very rushed during appointments, the waiting room is full but going in there with your set of questions and making sure that your concerns are addressed and answered can help to relieve the stress. Getting information about GDM in other sources family, friends, *credible* resources on the internet for instance, are all ways of helping you better understand so that you can reduce some of the fears which may not be based on reality. This can help you reduce the stress and feel more empowered.

Reaching out to your family and friends and just talking about how you feel can be very empowering and can really help you reduce the stress and anxiety of getting this diagnosis and learning how to manage GDM for the remainder of the pregnancy. So I encourage people to use their support network. Studies have shown that women who do use their support network and who feel that, even if they don't use it all the time, but feel that there are people around them that they can talk to — partner, friends, family — that can really make a difference in terms of meeting the challenges of pregnancy. It can also help meeting the challenges once the baby arrives and those first few months of trying to balance everything and trying to get things under control. Reaching out is important. It gives you that feeling that you're not alone and makes you feel connected to with others in your network.

Another way of helping with the anxiety of pregnancy and related to having a diagnosis of GDM is to learn some relaxation techniques. Things like progressive muscle relaxation which involves tensing and relaxing various muscles in your body, guided imagery which involves thinking about a place that you've been to that you have found very relaxing— the sights the sounds the smells associated with that. Just being there for 10 or 15 minutes can also be very helpful in terms of reducing that stress response.

People always ask me which relaxation technique is better. They've all been shown to be effective. It's more which one is right for you and making it part of your routine . We should *not* only do relaxation techniques when we're stressed. We should do them all the time. The analogy I use is that it's like putting money in the bank and saving your money. This is like saving for stressful times. It helps to increase your tolerance to stress. So I really encourage people to make relaxation techniques part of their routine.

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