



What are the signs of stress?

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Hello. I'm Dr. Deborah Da Costa, I'm a researcher and a psychologist here at the Research Institute at the McGill University Health Centre. A big part of my research is focused on perinatal mental health. So that's helping moms and dads transition to parenthood and optimize their mental health as they go on into this exciting journey.

So stress is important to manage during pregnancy for a number of reasons. When we're stressed it certainly has an impact on our quality of life. It's hard to do things as you normally do when you're constantly worrying or feeling anxious or frustrated or depressed. These are different symptoms that women can experience when they're feeling stressed and stress can have negative effects.

People ask me all the time if there could be a negative impact on my pregnancy if I'm stressed. And there's some research to show that stress, not alone but in combination with other things, can certainly increase your risk of certain complications like high blood pressure, your blood sugars is being off, the baby not growing enough, and complications during delivery. So both mental health and physical benefits to learning how to better manage your stress during pregnancy and into the postpartum period.

It's important to recognize when you're feeling stressed out what happens is a lot of times out we wait until we're *up here* in order to realize that we need to take a step back and manage our stress. And by the time we get there we're already feeling a very heightened sense of stress and it becomes more difficult to manage it. So I would say is the very first step is to recognize your own personal signs and symptoms of stress.

Signs and symptoms of stress vary, sometimes you'll experience certain sets more than others depending on what's going on in different situations but they can fall into 4 categories.

1. The first one is physical signs and that's usually the first once you start to experience because your body is good at giving you signs but we're not very good recognizing those signs. So common signs are things like having difficulty sleeping, feeling fatigued, low on energy, your muscles getting all tensed up, heartburn, and digestive issues. Now you're thinking: well those are some symptoms that we feel when we're pregnant as well. And, yes, they are, but stress can exacerbate those symptoms. So that's why it's important to be cognizant of those physical signs of stress.
2. Stress affects the way you feel. Emotions come about when you're feeling stressed. You may feel angry, irritable, sad, very anxious and concerned. So it's important to tune into the emotional aspects of stress.

3. Stress and influences the way you behave. You do things differently when you're stressed. You might notice that you're biting your nails or having trouble sleeping for instance. You might notice that you don't want to be with people, you just want to kind of hibernate and be on your own. These are all signs of stress that can make stress worse.
4. There's the way stress influences the way you think. When you're stressed it's difficult to concentrate, it's difficult to make decisions, it's difficult to remember things when you're feeling stressed. You tend to see things very negatively. The glass is half empty rather than half full.

So again, it's important to tune in to how stress affects you in terms of your thinking, in terms of your physical symptoms, in terms of your emotions, and the way you behave.