



7 ways to be a stress-free mum-to-be

Feeling anxious? Here's how to have a healthier, happier pregnancy

Being pregnant stirs up lots of strong emotions, from joy and excitement to anxiety and stress. It's natural to feel nervous about what you eat or drink, and worry about whether your unborn baby is healthy, but too much stress can take its toll.

'The effect of maternal stress on an unborn baby's health is not known,' says Gail Johnson, of the Royal College of Midwives. Studies on the subject have been inconclusive, although new Dutch research shows that women reporting both high levels of anxiety and depression were more

likely to deliver babies with low birth weights. Here are seven easy ways to keep your stress levels in check...

1

Plan ahead

Your bump will be a baby before you know it, so make a list of all the things you need to do. Then give each one an end date, says stress specialist Helen Wingstedt (stressspot.co.uk). 'Sort them or ditch them – both options will allow the issue to be crossed off your list, which will mean you'll be less stressed once your baby actually arrives,' she says.

2

Pick your priorities

Tiredness will probably never be far away during your pregnancy, especially during your first trimester. 'Finding the energy you need to complete your daily tasks can seem like a struggle sometimes, but there is a way to consciously create more energy,' says Helen. 'Identify three achievable tasks a day and do the one you least want to do first. Completing it will allow your mind to dump a huge amount of stress and generate a buzz which will enable you to fly through the rest.'

3

Make time for a tea break

Take time out of your busy day for a soothing cup of caffeine-free herbal tea. 'Chamomile and lemon balm have been shown to have an anti-anxiety effect,' says medical herbalist Lucy Stephens (revaclinic.com).

4

Get moving

Exercise releases endorphins, also known as happy hormones, which help to combat the negative effects of stress. 'Try to exercise daily – anything from brisk walks to a regular yoga class,' says antenatal teacher Gill Perks (gentlebirth.org.uk). Not only will you feel great, but you'll be building your stamina for the birth.

5

Avoid overshare

Do you really want to hear a blow-by-blow description of your friend's marathon labour? 'Mums-to-be can panic about birth, as they don't know what to expect,' says HypnoBirthing practitioner Anouska Longley (birthsense.co.uk). 'Try to limit your exposure to negative stories and expose yourself to as many positive experiences as you can.'

6

Practise 7/11 breathing

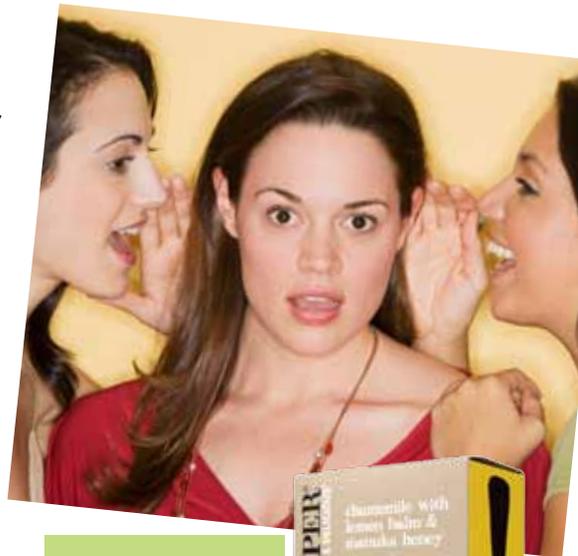
Breathing is a great way to deal with anxiety and help you feel relaxed, but you don't need to wait until b-day to use it. 'I work with lots of worried mums-to-be and 7/11 breathing really is an amazing stress-busting tool,' says cognitive hypnotherapist Kirsty Hanly (kirstyhanly.co.uk). 'It allows you to

exhale more oxygen than you inhale, counteracting the over-breathing that occurs when we are stressed.'

7

Zone out

Visualisation is another technique used during labour that can help you to manage stress during pregnancy, too. Find a quiet and comfy spot and spend a few moments allowing your breathing to settle. 'Imagine going off to a calm place in your mind – a beach or a beautiful room,' says Kirsty. 'Some people like to visualise a word that reminds them of what they want to feel – peace, calm or relaxed.' For a free MP3 script guiding you through this, email info@kirstyhanly.co.uk. **PR**



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Instant de-stress

- STEP 1** Get comfy
- STEP 2** Breathe in through your nose for a count of seven. Imagine the air is reaching all the way down to your diaphragm
- STEP 3** Breathe out through your mouth for a count of 11. Repeat as many times as is necessary for you to feel calm and relaxed



For more on how to keep your pregnancy as stress-free as you can, see

Babyexpert.com