

A TEEN'S GUIDE TO PREGNANCY

GIVING BIRTH AND LIFE AS A MOM

- What about school?
- Who will help me?
- How will my body change?
- Can I have sex during pregnancy?
- What about the baby's father?
- I haven't told anyone yet!
- I'm scared of labour.
- I feel sad all the time.
- Do I have other choices?
- Where else can I go for support?
- How do I find a counsellor?
- Why is it so difficult to cope?
- Should I breastfeed?
- What will motherhood be like?

This booklet tries to answer some of the questions you have about pregnancy, labour, becoming a mother and raising a child.



All women who are pregnant experience changes in body, self-image, expectations and relationships. These changes are often felt more strongly in teenagers.

A part of you could be struggling with the normal issues of being a teenager, yet another part is facing the responsibilities of an adult.

Having a baby is a big event in your life, whether you are 30 or 16, and whether it was planned or not.

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Government
Health

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How will my body change?

As the baby grows inside you, your body will be changing all the time. Some of the differences you notice will last a short time and others for longer. Some of these changes could be quite uncomfortable:

- Your breasts may grow bigger and may become sensitive
- You could suffer from morning sickness (nausea or vomiting)
- You may urinate (pee) more often
- Your joints and back may ache and you may have cramps
- You may have more saliva than usual
- Your feet and hands could swell
- You may experience constipation, stomach ache or heartburn

Heartburn is harmless (when it doesn't happen too often) but it can be very uncomfortable and painful. To prevent it:

- Avoid drinking during meals
- Eat smaller meals more often
- Avoid eating big meals before bed
- Don't eat too quickly
- Sit upright while eating
- Wear loose fitting clothes
- Bend from your knees, not from your waist
- Try to sleep with your head higher than your feet

In adults, these uncomfortable changes can be quite upsetting, but they can become unbearable in teenagers, whose bodies are still changing and growing. Most of the time, the symptoms and physical changes due to the pregnancy go away after giving birth. Your body should be back to normal after 9 to 12 months, often sooner than that.

To ease heartburn, try this stretch

1. Kneel in front of a wall.
2. Spread your knees apart.
3. Keep your toes together and heels apart.
4. Keep your bum firmly down on your feet and place your hands palm down against the wall.
5. Walk your hands up the wall, keeping your bum and shoulder blades as low as possible, until you feel stretching between your shoulder blades and less pressure from your baby in your lower chest.

What can I eat?

Some foods and activities can be harmful to the baby while in the womb. During pregnancy, try to avoid:

- Caffeine (coffee, tea, Coke, Pepsi)
- Alcohol, drugs, cigarettes
- Some types of medication – check with a doctor

If you smoke, drink alcohol or take drugs, talk to a nurse or counsellor about it. It is also important that you have a healthy diet during pregnancy, so

that you and your baby stay healthy. Sometimes filling up on soda drinks and chips means you may not have enough room for the good foods you and your baby need. Examples of good food to eat during pregnancy are listed in the box below.

1. Grain products (cereal, brown or whole wheat bread, and brown rice)
2. Fruit and vegetables
3. Proteins (fish, meat, lentils, beans, and nuts)
4. Dairy products (milk and yoghurt)
5. Liquids (water, Rooibos tea and diluted juice)

I haven't told anyone yet.

You may feel very alone when you find out that you are pregnant.

You may be scared or worried about telling someone about your pregnancy, like your parents, family or other loved ones. But, it is important to talk to an adult who you trust so that you can get their support. It can be very hard to make decisions on your own about your pregnancy or caring for your baby.

The longer you keep your pregnancy a secret, the more alone, overwhelmed and worried you could become. Once you have told someone, you can get support with the decisions you need to make, and you will not feel so alone.

It is also important to book for antenatal care at a midwife obstetric unit, BANC clinic or maternity hospital as soon as you can. This is very important for your own health, and the health of your baby.

Staff at the antenatal clinic may also be able to provide you with support and information to help you make the best decisions.

It is important to book for antenatal care as soon as possible.

“I wrote a letter to my unborn baby. I told her that I was scared, but that I wanted to be a good mother to her. I wrote about my feelings, and about what kind of future I wanted for her and for me.”

See: *Why is bonding so important?* page 9
Finding a counsellor. page 11



When you have the support of someone you trust, it is easier to make decisions and plan for your future. If you have decided to keep your baby, you will be getting used to the idea of becoming a mother over the next few months. Getting to know your baby can help with this big change in your life. It is empowering for you and your baby to start bonding. This means developing a good relationship with your baby, even before you meet him or her.

There are many ways for you to get to know your baby during your pregnancy. You could start keeping a notebook of your thoughts during your pregnancy and about your baby. In your notebook, you could start imagining what your baby will be like, and what kind of mother you would like to be to your child.

Remember, your baby can hear you as he or she grows inside of you, so talk and sing to your baby. This helps your relationship grow. Notice when and how your baby moves inside of you. You can start to tell when your baby sleeps and wakes up.

What about school?

“Some kids and teachers at school were acting strange around me when I started showing. But my L.O. teacher was always there if I wanted to talk.”

- You will need to decide if or when you want to go back to school after your baby is born. You may wonder about going back as soon as possible, or after a longer period of time, like the next year.
- With the right amount of support from friends and family, some teenage mothers manage to combine both school and taking care of their baby.

If the decision about schooling is difficult to make, or causes problems in your family, speak about it to a counsellor, teacher or someone you trust.

It is great if you can think about your relationship with your baby, as well as your future, and do what is possible for you.

Going back to school

Going back to school means you can complete your education. This may help you find work and make you and your baby more independent and financially secure in the future.

Staying at home with the baby

Staying at home may help you build a stronger bond with your baby. This can be helpful for the baby's development and health.

What about the baby's father?

Your pregnancy could have affected your relationship with the baby's father. This may be more difficult if the pregnancy was unplanned. It may even have caused your relationship to end.

You may feel:

- Angry and think that life is unfair: the father's life goes on as usual, while you have to deal with the pregnancy.
- Sad and abandoned: you may think that no one will want to be with you again.

For these reasons, it may be difficult to decide about the father's involvement with his baby.

- Think about what is best for your baby.
- Even if a child's parents do not live together, he or she could still have a loving relationship with each parent.

All parents have a legal duty to support their children financially, even if they are not married or living together. You have a right to receive financial support from the father.

You have a right

To receive financial support from the baby's father. If you feel that the baby's father is not providing enough support, contact the Maintenance Court in your area. They can explain what you can do, the information and papers you need to provide, as well as the best time to come and collect a maintenance order. It is best that your legal guardian or parent be with you when you go to the Maintenance Court.

See: Where else can I go for support? page 12

Should I be worried if my partner is violent?

- A stressful pregnancy can lead to conflicts between you and your partner. Sometimes, this can lead to violence.
- Violence is bad for a relationship; you and your baby should not have to suffer from it. It is important to talk to a nurse or counsellor if this is happening or if you are scared it might happen.

“He used to hit me when he came back from his friends – especially if I said no to sex. When I was finally ready to leave him, I felt so relieved and free. I felt hopeful again.”

You and your baby do not have to experience violence or abuse.

I was sexually abused.



- Your pregnancy may be the result of sexual abuse. You are not to blame: you are a survivor of a crime.
- You may find yourself feeling angry with your baby but actually you are angry with your baby's father. It is important to talk to a counsellor if you feel this way, so that you can put those feelings in the right place and see your baby as innocent.
- Talk to a counsellor if you have experienced sexual abuse and if you are unsure about your feelings towards your baby.

Can I have sex during pregnancy?

- If you wish, you can continue to have sex during pregnancy: this should not harm the baby. However, make sure your partner does not put all his weight on your belly.
- If you develop medical complications, you may be advised not to have sex until the baby arrives. If you or your partner notice any unusual signs during or after sex (e.g. stomach cramps, abnormal discharge or vaginal bleeding) it is best to stop having sex and let the midwife know.
- If you are having sexual relationships, think about taking control of your sexual health. Some sexually transmitted infections can affect your baby's survival and your future fertility.
- In the future, protect yourself to avoid an unplanned pregnancy, to avoid getting sexually transmitted infections, or becoming HIV positive.

Protect yourself

It is important to get tested for HIV/AIDS during at least one of your antenatal visits at the clinic. If you are HIV positive, you can get support for yourself and your baby to remain healthy and happy. Ask to speak to an HIV counsellor at your clinic for more information.

Why is it so hard to cope?

- You are going through a life-changing experience, so it is common to feel overwhelmed or scared.
- Your hormone levels change during pregnancy and this affects your mood. So, at times you may feel happy or excited, and at others, very miserable and irritable. These are mood swings and can sometimes last throughout pregnancy.
- You may have problems sleeping. When this happens, you can be even more tired than usual, and so become more irritable and impatient.
- You may find it difficult to find people you can trust. But try to connect with people around you and explain how you feel and what worries you. They may understand you better and then will be better able to provide the support you need.
- If you feel low in mood for a few weeks, you may be experiencing depression.
- If you feel worried a lot for a few weeks, you may be experiencing anxiety.
- Some people have symptoms of depression AND anxiety. Mental health counselling and sometimes medication can be very helpful.

See: *I feel sad most of the time.* page 10

You may feel that ending your life is the only way to end the stress you're feeling. This is not a sign of weakness or 'craziness'. It means that you are experiencing more pain and stress than you can cope with.

**Call the Lifeline
National Helpline
0861 322 322
Toll Free**

When you feel this bad, it is difficult to imagine another way of living.

Who will help me?

Support during your pregnancy and after giving birth is important for your physical and mental health. Support can mean help, safety and comfort:

- You may feel scared to tell your family about your pregnancy, but it is important for them to know. They could support you emotionally and practically.
- It is possible that your family does not react positively to the pregnancy, and that this leads to tension at home. Give them time to take in the news. They may change their minds about your pregnancy later on.
- Your friends can also be a great support. You may be worried about how they will

react and that they will not understand how you feel and what you're going through. Try not to withdraw from them. Friends who care about you will want to be there for you and help you.

If you feel you have no support, talk to a counsellor or someone else you trust. Together you can identify other sources of support.

See: *Finding a counsellor.* page 11
Where else can I go for support? page 12

I'm scared of labour

- Most women worry about labour, especially first-time mothers.
- You may be given a safe delivery leaflet at the clinic, which describes how to know when you're in labour, and explains the different stages of labour. It will also explain what happens once you arrive at the clinic.
- The experience of labour is different for all mothers. Some mothers experience long labours and describe them as easy; others experience short and relatively painless birth, but think it was terrible.

- Sometimes things don't go as planned and caesareans (or C-sections) have to be performed. This short operation may be the best way to ensure a healthy mother and baby. Mothers usually recover well within a few weeks.
- Talk to a nurse about your options regarding pain relief in your clinic.
- If you didn't get the safe delivery leaflet or if you have any other questions about labour, let a nurse know so she can help you.
- During the stages of labour, you are likely to go through many emotions and physical experiences. A birth companion by your side (like your mom, sister, friend, partner or aunt) may help you through these.

How will I feel after childbirth?

- Wait until 6 weeks after birth before having sex. Make sure you take family planning precautions when you do. It may take a bit more time before you are ready to have a normal sex life again.
- It is possible that you feel a bit down after giving birth. You may feel sadness, frustration, fear and guilt. This is very common and these feelings usually go away after a few days.
- In some cases, these feelings stay and get worse. This could be postnatal depression or anxiety. If you think you may be suffering from this, talk to a counsellor about it.

See: *I feel sad most of the time.* page 10

As early as possible, try to think about **someone who could be your birth companion**. A birth companion is a person who you trust and who is willing to support you during labour. Discuss the birth companion policy with the nurses at the clinic.

“Just having my big cousin with me in labour made all the difference. It was still scary, but at least I wasn't alone.”

It is very common to feel a bit down after giving birth. If these feelings don't go away after several weeks, or if they get worse, talk to a counsellor.



What will motherhood be like?

New mothers often doubt that they are able to take care of a baby. As a teenager, it can be even more difficult to be fully aware of what it means to be a mother.

Motherhood starts during pregnancy. While in the womb, the baby grows, moves, listens and responds to the world around him or her. Your baby's development in the womb helps him or her to develop after birth.

Raising a child is demanding, and as a teenager, this may be difficult to accept. However, all the effort you put in during and after pregnancy will help your baby grow healthier and make you feel proud as a mom.

Paying attention to your baby, communicating with him or her, being patient and loving can help you to have a more fulfilling experience of motherhood.

“I felt so proud when I got the breastfeeding right. I knew my baby was growing strong from my body. And she could cuddle and hear my heart at the same time.”

Being a good mother doesn't mean being perfect.

Should I breastfeed?

- Before you give birth, it is good to think about whether you want to breastfeed or not. It may not be very easy at first, but staff at the clinic can help you with this.
- Breastfeeding has many advantages for you and the baby. There are also physical benefits for you, the mother.
- If you decide to breastfeed, try to do so for as long as possible. Breastfeeding for longer has greater benefits for the baby. At least 6 months is recommended.
- If you decide to bottle feed, ask the nurse for practical information on how to formula-feed so that it is most effective and safe.
- Some women can't breastfeed. There may be a health or other reason for this. If this is your case, don't feel bad. If you can't breastfeed, it doesn't mean you are a bad mother.

Some benefits of breastfeeding

1. It protects the baby from infections and diseases.
2. Breast milk is natural and clean, and is available whenever and wherever the baby needs to feed. It is free.
3. It helps build a bond between you and your baby.
4. It reduces the risk of bleeding after birth.
5. It helps you get back into shape after childbirth.
6. It reduces the risk of breast cancer and diabetes.

Why is bonding so important?

- Bonding is the relationship you make with your baby. It is important because it helps your baby grow stronger and healthier.
- During pregnancy, you have close contact with your baby: this is when you can start bonding.
- Bonding can also happen after birth through physical touch, talking, smiling, making eye contact and playing with your baby.
- Bonding is also important for you: it helps you feel better about yourself as a mother, and helps you persevere through the tough times.
- Sometimes the bond does not develop naturally as one takes care of a baby. If you find bonding difficult, talk to a counsellor at the clinic or in the community, so you can get to understand your feelings.

“After several weeks, I started playing little smiling games with my baby. Also, I could see that when I sang to him, he was comforted by my voice.”

Bond with your baby during pregnancy

1. Start a notebook where you write down your thoughts and feelings about your baby during your pregnancy.
2. Sing and talk to your baby.
3. When does your baby move? Do you think he or she is waking up or sleeping?

Do I have other choices?

You may feel that you are under so much stress and responsibility that one way out is to abandon your baby. But there are other options.

Approach your family about your feelings towards your pregnancy or baby – someone may agree to take care of your child until you feel ready to be a mother.

If you have mixed feelings about the baby or if you are unsure about raising a child, talk to a counsellor about it.

You have a choice.

If you have been pregnant for less than 20 weeks, abortion may be an option:

- There are different methods of abortion, depending on how many weeks pregnant you are.
- Abortion can come with health complications. Risks are reduced if you choose a safe medical abortion. Illegal abortion is dangerous and can seriously damage your health.
- You do not need consent from your parents or an adult to have an abortion. However, it may be best to talk to someone you trust before making your decision.

If you have been pregnant for more than 20 weeks, or if you do not want to have an abortion, you can also decide to give your baby for adoption. The counsellor or social worker at the clinic can help you with this.

I feel sad most of the time

I don't enjoy things the way I used to.

Sometimes I think about hurting myself.

I feel tired more than usual.

I feel shaky, I sweat a lot and my heart races

I can't concentrate at school.

I worry so much that it affects my sleep and appetite.

I feel hopeless.

I cry all the time.

I don't want to spend time with my friends . I just want to be alone.

Everything is my fault.

You may have felt worried, stressed or sad before you were pregnant. Now that you are pregnant, you may be feeling even more overwhelmed with so many things to think about and choices to make. Below are descriptions of depression and anxiety. If you feel that you have more than two of these symptoms, try to make contact with a counsellor or a person you can talk to.

- **What is depression? Someone who is depressed has** low mood and other symptoms lasting for at least two to four weeks. Symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling very sad
- Not feeling able to experience pleasure
- Struggling to concentrate
- Eating more than usual, or less than usual
- Changes in usual sleeping patterns
- Feeling very guilty or very worthless
- Feeling hopeless and helpless
- Suicidal thoughts or a suicide attempt

- **What is anxiety?** Anxiety is an overwhelming sense of uneasiness, worry or fear. Symptoms of anxiety include:

- Sweating, physical tension and an increased pulse
- Changes in usual sleeping patterns
- Nervousness or feelings of panic
- Feeling tired more easily
- Struggling to concentrate
- Feeling irritable

Turn to the back page for a list of useful contact numbers to find the support you need.

You can feel better.

These negative thoughts can be difficult to deal with. A counsellor can help you feel better about yourself and about being a mother.

Finding a counsellor

In this booklet, we suggest it may help you to speak to a counsellor. Sometimes your nurse or midwife can help you find a professional counsellor.

A counsellor is someone who is trained to listen to people and guide them through problems, emotional difficulties and decision-making.

A counsellor could be someone from the clinic such as a doctor, nurse, social worker or mental health counsellor.

But there may not always be a trained counsellor near you. So it is important to remember that you can find your own counsellor.

- Do you know someone you can trust?
- Someone you think is wise and who may be able to help you make decisions that are best for you?
- Are you comfortable with this person?

If so, this could be someone who could be your counsellor.

Your counsellor could be a trusted friend, a priest or Imam, a teacher, or a relative. You are the best person to work out who you feel most comfortable with.

It may take some time before you can build trust together with your chosen counsellor. It is worth the effort. Counsellors can be very supportive during difficult times.

“I had always been a bit scared of the counsellor. But when I went to her, it was amazing how kind she was. She really helped me.”

Talking to a counsellor can help you with what you are going through.



Where else can I go for support?

CAFDA HIV/AIDS

Support groups
021 706 2050 (Schaapkraal)

Cape Town Drug Counselling Centre

Individual and family counselling & outpatient treatment for drug problems

Marie Stopes

Observatory 021 447 8026
Mitchell's Plain 021 397 0103/04
Information related to pregnancy, emergency contraception, family planning and abortion.

Lifeline/Crisis Counselling

Support for personal crises,
Trauma, abuse & rape
0800 150 150
0861 322 322 (Toll free)
021 361 9197 (Khayelitsha)

Love Life Sexual Health Line

0800 121 900

Maintenance Courts

Athlone 021 696 2825 or 021 697 1735
7-9am Tues & Thurs
Mitchell's Plain 021 370 4200 • 7-9am
Tues & Wed
Wynberg 021 799 1832 or 021 799 1800 •
7-10am Tues & Thurs
Domestic Violence 021 696 2826
0800 11 77 85

SA Depression & Anxiety Group (SADAG)

Suicide: 0800 567 567
24hr Helpline: 0800 456 789

St Anne's Home

Shelter for destitute and abused women and their children.
021 448 6792 (Woodstock)

Women's Legal Centre

Free legal advice and support.
021 424 5660

Mosaic

Centre for abused women; HIV/AIDS services.
021 761 7585 (Wynberg)

Saartjie Baartman

Shelter for abused women and their children.
021 633 5287 (Mannenberg)

Parent Centre

Prenatal and postnatal counselling and support groups for teen mothers; parenting skills
Counselling and info for parents.
021 762 0116 (Wynberg)
021 361 9382 (Khayelitsha)
083 257 3386
083 257 3541 (Gugulethu)

Rape Crisis

Individual counselling and support for rape survivors.
021 447 1467 (Observatory)
Counselling line: 201 44 7 97 62
021 684 1180 (Athlone)
Counselling line: 021 633 9229

Rape Trauma Line

021 447 9762 or 083 222 5158

SANCA

Counselling and services for people with substance use problem.
Athlone/Gugulethu 021 638 5116
Paarl 021 872 9671
Khayelitsha 021 364 5131
Tygerberg 021 945 2098

Thuthuzela Centre

Counselling sexual and reproductive health services for rape survivors.
021 360 4200/4570

Zoe Project

Counselling related to adoption and abortion.
073 174 1992



"I met another mother at the baby clinic. We now meet every Tuesday afternoon to chat and play with the kids. It makes me feel less alone in some way."

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