

Important Considerations Regarding Depression During Pregnancy and Postpartum

Antenatal Depression:

- Approximately 15% of women experience clinically significant depression during pregnancy
- Women with a history of bipolar disorder are at very high risk of recurrent illness and should be followed by a mental health professional
- Pregnancy puts women with a prior history of depression at a high risk of recurrence
- Untreated depression during pregnancy presents serious health risks for mothers and infants
- Depression during pregnancy is the strongest predictor of postpartum depression
- Mild to moderate depression may respond to non pharmacologic intervention
- Pharmacologic treatments for depression carry overall small risks and should be considered for moderate to severe depression taking into account the individual history, the risks and benefits of untreated depression during pregnancy and the risk of fetal exposure to antidepressants.
- Prenatal education about perinatal mood disorders diminishes stigma and increases the likelihood of acceptable treatment intervention

Postpartum Depression:

- Approximately 15% of women will experience clinically significant depression during the postpartum period.
- Postpartum depression and anxiety disorders can begin immediately after birth and up to a year after delivery.
- Despite multiple contacts with health care professionals, postpartum depression most often is undiagnosed and therefore untreated.
- The suicide rate is increased 70 fold with postpartum depression necessitating assessment of suicidality as part of every screening for postpartum depression.
- Delay in diagnosis is the biggest contributing factor to the length of postpartum depression.
- Standardized and validated screening tools are available.
- Mild to moderate postpartum depression may respond to non pharmacologic intervention.
- Treatment is available and very effective.
- Women with bipolar disorder are at highest risk for recurrent illness and for postpartum psychosis
- Postpartum psychosis is considered a psychiatric emergency and is associated with a significant risk of infanticide.
- Untreated postpartum depression poses serious and long term health risks to mother and child.
- Children of mothers with postpartum depression are at risk for poor growth as well as attachment, cognitive and behavioral disturbances
- The use of antidepressant in lactating mother's is associated with overall minimal risks to the breastfed infant and needs to be considered in the case of moderate to severe postpartum depression taking into account the individual history and the risks and benefits of medication treatment.