

Mindfulness During Pregnancy



From the *moment* you discover you are pregnant, it is the start of a transformative process of both body and mind. For many women, it is a time like no other in their lives, filled with great excitement but also with great uncertainty, fear and vulnerability. Therefore, pregnancy offers an ideal time to practice mindfulness to manage the emotional stresses and uncertainties of pregnancy, childbirth and the sudden leap into parenthood.

Benefits of Mindfulness During Pregnancy

Practicing mindfulness during pregnancy has shown positive results in improving pregnant women's overall well-being. Although the research is new, there are promising results. Here are 5 benefits for pregnant women.

According to the research:

1. With stress and mood playing a large part in pregnancy, research has found that *mindfulness* successfully decreases stress, depression and anxiety during pregnancy and boosts positive emotions.
2. Mindfulness helps to reduce premature births
3. Mindfulness has shown to lower blood pressure and heart rate
4. New research has shown mindfulness to reduce pain during pregnancy and labour
5. Research suggests that mindfulness helps to strengthen the attachment with baby

8 tips to incorporate mindfulness during pregnancy

1. **1. Embrace the experience and take time to be with your baby**

Begin by *slowing down* to ensure you capture the 'unique moments' of your pregnancy. In the chaos of day-to-day life before your baby is born, I encourage you to take time out for just a few moments of quiet mindfulness to 'be' with your baby. As your baby grows, you can feel its movements becoming stronger and more frequent. Your baby's movement offers you an opportunity to STOP and come back to the present moment. Simply pause and tune into your physical sensations and your baby's movements. Mindfully taking time to stop and pause to 'be' with your baby helps you to be more aware, awake, present and connected with your baby before its birth.

2. **Slow down**

When we slow down in life we can connect with the present. Not only is slowing down important for your body during pregnancy but also for your mind. Begin to slow down and cherish this special time.

3. **Focus on the breath**

Regular breathwork during pregnancy can be a wonderful preparation for childbirth and parenthood. The breath is with us all the time and thus is free and can be practiced anywhere. Not alone is the breath important for delivering oxygen to the body and in turn to your baby when you are pregnant but it also helps to ground us in the present, especially during times of stress. The breath also helps us to actively *let go* of unhelpful/worrisome thoughts and grounds us back in the present. It gives us a place to ground ourselves in the midst of chaos. And so, provides a place of calm, clarity and focus which in turn helps us to respond effectively to stress as opposed to reacting to stressful situations. Your breath is important for your mind and body and for your baby.

Practice by placing your hand on your stomach and connect with your baby's movements and the movement of your breath.

4. **Let go of unhelpful thoughts**

The mind is constantly generating thoughts, often worrisome and unhelpful thoughts. By engaging in worrisome thoughts about the future, something that we can't predict we increase our stress levels. Through mindfulness, we can become more aware of our thoughts and emotions while taking a step back from them as opposed to reacting and getting caught up in them. We don't have to get caught up in them. We have a choice about where we put our attention. Use your breath or your baby's movements as an anchor to bring you back to the present and to let go of unhelpful thoughts.

5. Partners, try to work as a team:

Partners are also having a birth experience and entering into parenthood. They too can benefit from mindfulness skills. When partners practice mindfulness they often find confidence in how to support their partner during the birth and also report finding inner resources to cope with lifestyle changes and the joys and challenges of parenting. Mindful communication can strengthen your relationship as well as practicing mindfulness individually and together.

6. Don't get too caught up in birth plans:

Knowing and researching about the kind of birth you want is an important step to making conscious choices in your childbirth. But it's equally valuable to acknowledge that things often don't go according to plan. Unfortunately, we can't plan birth no matter how much we want to. We can't plan or control the timing, or the length of the labour. When and how you deliver may be beyond your control. What you can control is how you deal with the unexpected and how you feel and respond to what unfolds. Be open and trust the birthing process.

7. Pain Management

During labour, your body produces very high levels of oxytocin that reduces pain and brings a sense of calmness. However, this hormone can often go unnoticed because when there is time in-between contractions, research has shown that this time is spent either anticipating the next contraction or thinking about the last one. When this happens, we are caught up in distressing thoughts, which leads to a rush of adrenaline, tensing up and increased suffering. Tip: Focus on your breath in-between the contractions and notice the sensations. By doing so, you are letting go of racing thoughts, fear and suffering. Using mindfulness meditation to stay focused during labour will give you the mental and physical stamina during your labour. Let go of anxious thoughts and replace with the thought that the pain will end and your baby's birth is the outcome while re-directing your attention back to the breath to help regulate emotions and manage the pain. Be proud of yourself, whether you have a two-hour or 24-hour labour and embrace the birthdate of your new arrival.

8. Mindfulness practice after the birth: mindful parenting.

Mindfulness is core to parenthood as it helps us to re-connect with the present and with your child. Furthermore it is important for self-care and to help parents capture the unique moments with their family. Many parents ask themselves – How can we raise our children to be happy and healthy? However, parenthood is not a skill but a relationship and core to this relationship is a deep connection, which is brought about by being fully present. Mindfulness not only deepens the connection but it also provides ongoing self-help for stress reduction.

Resources

- Mindfulness for Pregnancy App
- Mindful Birthing: Training the Mind, Body and Heart for Childbirth and Beyond – Book
- Headspace

If you feel like you would benefit from individual mindfulness coaching during pregnancy, contact the Consulting Clinic to book your appointment.

Email: admin@theconsultingclinic.ie

Phone: 01 6859261