

Impact of Maternal Stress on Pregnancy: A Commentary

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DESCRIPTION

Pregnancy is a transformative and often joyous time in a woman's life. However, it can also bring about various physical and emotional changes that may contribute to increased stress levels. Maternal stress, whether caused by personal, societal, or environmental factors, can have a profound impact on both the mother and the developing fetus.

Maternal stress refers to the psychological and physiological responses experienced by expectant mothers in response to challenging or adverse circumstances. Common stressors during pregnancy include financial concerns, relationship difficulties, work pressures, health worries, and societal stressors. Additionally, hormonal changes and physical discomfort can also contribute to heightened stress levels.

Effects of maternal stress on pregnancy

The effects of maternal stress during pregnancy are as follows:

Impact on fetal development: Maternal stress triggers the release of stress hormones, such as cortisol, which can cross the placental barrier and affect the developing fetus. Prolonged exposure to high levels of cortisol may disrupt the normal growth and development of the baby's organs, including the brain, potentially leading to long-term consequences.

Preterm birth and low birth weight: High levels of maternal stress have been associated with an increased risk of preterm birth and low birth weight. Premature babies and those with low birth weight are more vulnerable to various health issues and developmental delays.

Maternal health complications: Maternal stress can also impact the mother's physical health during pregnancy. It has been linked to a higher risk of gestational hypertension, pre-eclampsia, and gestational diabetes.

Long-term consequences for the child

The following are the consequences that are included:

Neurodevelopmental issues: Prenatal exposure to maternal stress has been linked to an increased risk of behavioral and

emotional problems in children. These include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and aggression. There is also evidence suggesting a potential impact on cognitive development and intelligence.

Altered stress response: The developing fetus exposed to high levels of maternal stress may experience alterations in their stress response system, leading to heightened reactivity to stress later in life. This can have implications for mental health, as well as the ability to cope with stressful situations.

Increased risk of chronic diseases: Several studies have indicated a correlation between maternal stress during pregnancy and an increased risk of developing chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity, in adulthood. The mechanisms behind these associations are still being explored but may involve epigenetic modifications and programming of physiological responses.

Managing and reducing maternal stress

This includes the following:

Emotional support: Seeking emotional support from loved ones, friends, or support groups can help alleviate stress. Sharing concerns and experiences with others who have gone through similar situations can provide reassurance and a sense of belonging.

Healthy lifestyle choices: Engaging in regular exercise, adopting relaxation techniques (e.g., meditation, deep breathing exercises), and maintaining a balanced diet can promote overall well-being and help manage stress levels.

Prenatal care and counseling: Regular prenatal check-ups provide an opportunity for healthcare professionals to address any concerns and provide guidance on stress management techniques. In some cases, counseling or therapy may be recommended to help expectant mothers develop effective coping strategies.

Self-care: Prioritizing self-care activities, such as getting adequate rest, engaging in hobbies, and engaging in activities that promote relaxation, can help reduce stress and promote a sense of well-being.

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