

NORMAL FATHER FEELINGS DURING PREGNANCY

Excerpt from the book "Keys to Becoming A Father" by William Sears, M.D.

There are a variety of normal feelings that most fathers experience during pregnancy. I have experienced some of the following feelings during our pregnancies, as have most dads. Learning to recognize these feelings as normal and coping with them is part of maturing as an expectant father.

Excitement. Perhaps the earliest feeling you may experience is that of being excited about the birth of your baby. The announcement of "honey we're pregnant!" should be the high point of your marriage. It is important for your wife to see you catch the spirit of her excitement.

Ambivalence. After the initial feeling of excitement, it is normal to begin to have some ambivalent feelings about how this new member of the family will affect your lifestyle, your marriage, your economic situation. How will you provide for your baby? Will you need to live temporarily on one income? Will you have enough time to be an "involved father"? *It is normal for fathers to begin imagining how the baby will affect their marriage.* Will there still be "dinners for two" or getaway trips? Many fathers will worry unnecessarily about long-term economic pressures, wondering how they will afford to send their child to college. It is normal at this time for them to question their adequacy as a father and a provider. I suggest that expectant fathers not dwell on fears about the future and how a baby may change their lifestyle and marriage. This unnecessary worry about the future may cause an otherwise jubilant father to focus more on what he is going to lose and how much he is going to have to sacrifice after the baby is born rather than the joy that the baby is going to bring into the family.

Dependency. The term "dependent" begins to take on real meaning with the first pregnancy. Most husbands do not really consider their wife as a dependent until the baby comes. Along with the feelings of how the baby will depend upon you comes the increasing realization that your wife is showing increasing dependence upon you during her pregnancy. These double responsibilities may make you question your ability to both care and provide for the baby and mother.

Pregnancy-like symptoms. Some expectant fathers actually experience pregnancy-like symptoms of weight gain, nausea, and mood swings. I remember experiencing a "fullness" during some of our pregnancies. I felt a sense of "completeness" as if my life had taken on more meaning. These feelings are most common as you dream about your baby (as expectant mothers often do) wondering what he/she will be like, how the baby will act, whether he will look like you.

Feelings of being left out. Some fathers complain that their wife is so preoccupied with the pregnancy that there is no time or energy left for them. It may help you to cope with these feelings if you understand the many changes that go on in your wife during her pregnancy.

Sexuality during pregnancy. The most difficult change for new fathers to adjust to is the difference in their wife's sexual responsiveness. The same hormones that are responsible for the development and nourishment of your baby now and after birth are the very hormones that cause tremendous fluctuations in a pregnant woman's sexual desires. During the first trimester of pregnancy, most women are less sexually interested and responsive because of fatigue and gastrointestinal upset. During the middle trimester, because mothers often feel better and have grown accustomed to being pregnant, a woman's sexual desires may actually increase. As a woman grows to feel better about herself, she may also feel better about sex. Midway through pregnancy it is common for an expectant mother to have a more heightened awareness of her own sexuality.

In the last trimester of pregnancy, most women's sexual desires diminish for several reasons: The tremendous changes in their bodies make them feel more awkward as a sexual partner; there may be an underlying fear of inducing premature labor (which could be discussed with her doctor), and fatigue sets in. Also, in the final months the nesting instinct begins causing a woman to concentrate on preparing her nest and thinking about her pre-born baby, not about sex. Your wife may be uninterested in sex in the final months of pregnancy because her hormones are directed to her pre-born baby. She may also forget that your hormones have not changed at all throughout pregnancy. As you become more aware of your own unsatisfied sexual needs, your wife may become painfully aware of her inability to satisfy them. *Here is where it is necessary to be mutually sensitive to each other's needs and show inventiveness in sexual techniques.*