

Pregnancy is an amazing time! For around nine months, a tiny human being is growing and developing within you. This tiny person has a mighty effect on your body, your body chemistry, your metabolism, your physical well-being, and your emotions! Throughout your pregnancy, you will experience physical changes, emotional ups and downs, unexplainable feelings, and so much more. If your emotions are all over the map, take heart and know that they will eventually even out as your hormones settle down.

The Chemistry of Emotions

You might think that emotions are just reactions to your circumstances, but there are also physiological factors that affect your emotions. The chemistry behind these emotions can be summed up in one word—hormones. Hormones are powerful substances in our bodies that perform specific functions. They regulate our metabolism, our hunger, our body's temperature, our immune system, our blood sugar levels, our reproductive system, and so much more.¹ Research has shown that certain circumstances can affect our moods, such as our social and physical environments, our diets, and our daily sleep patterns. Even the amount of exercise we get affects our hormones, which regulate our brain's response system and this further affects our moods.² Pregnancy hormones have an even more profound effect on mood and emotions because of their higher levels and radical fluctuations. The chemicals in your brain that regulate mood, called neurotransmitters, are affected by the fluctuations in your hormone levels. These fluctuations mostly occur in the first trimester of pregnancy, between six to ten weeks, and then again in the third trimester as your body prepares for childbirth.³

The Mother's Circumstances

Hormone fluctuations compounded with physical discomforts can make you feel more intense emotions or mood swings. The physical stressors present in your life can also impact how you feel. Depending on your larger life circumstances, your pregnancy is either a joyous discovery or one filled with uncertainty and fear. Pregnancy is a life-changing event, regardless of whether this is your first child or one of several. But one thing is certain: You are feeling it—and everything else—more deeply and more intensely.

The Mother's Temperament

How you're raised determines how you respond to things, but a great deal of your temperament was determined in your genes. Temperament includes a person's character, outlook, and tendencies revealed through their reactions and affects how you feel and how strongly you feel things. Think about what type of temperament you have, and then develop a strategy to help yourself get through your pregnancy.

Depression's Effect on Emotions

Up to twenty-three percent of women experience depression during their pregnancies, but very few seek treatment. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish depression from other symptoms of pregnancy. Sometimes women just chalk symptoms of depression up to their hormones and ultimately suffer needlessly. Depression is a disease that you cannot help, and it needs to be treated by your doctor. You should not be ashamed of it. If you think you might be experiencing depression, tell your doctor.^{6,7,8,9}

Emotional Survival Tips

There are some things you can do to help even out those jangled, confusing, fluctuating emotions. Start by giving yourself permission to accept feelings and emotions without guilt. Talk to the people in your life most affected by your highs and lows. They will be more understanding if they are aware it's not personal. Other things you can do are:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Make time for fun.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Get exercise.
- Ask for help – especially professional help when needed. If you find yourself crying consistently, and/or feeling down or hopeless for more than two weeks without any pleasurable moments in between, talk to your doctor.¹⁰

While the intensity and shifts in your emotions can often be chalked up to hormones, let's face it; the work of creating a brand-new life is an intense, spiritual, and emotional journey. And women get to experience it in a way that no one else does.

Resources include:

1. Endocrine Society. What Are Hormones, and What Do They Do? Washington, DC. Found at <http://www.hormone.org/hormones-and-health/what-do-hormones-do/hormones-and-what-do-they-do>, accessed 3/4/2019.
2. Connections. Women's International Pharmacy. Moods & Hormones: Emotional Health and Well-Being Throughout the Life Cycle. Found at <http://www.womensinternational.com/connections/moods.html>, accessed 3/4/2019.
3. American Pregnancy Association. Mood Swings During Pregnancy. Found at <http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-health/mood-swings-during-pregnancy/>, accessed 3/4/2019.
4. Hochwald, L. Parents. A Cheat Sheet to Pregnancy Hormones. Found at <http://www.parents.com/pregnancy/my-life/emotions/understanding-pregnancy-hormones/>, accessed 3/4/2019.
5. Pew Research Center. Social & Demographic Trends. Parenting in America. December 17, 2015. Washington, DC. Found at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/2-satisfaction-time-and-support/>, accessed 3/4/2019.
6. Rope, K. Parents. Coping With Anxiety and Depression During Pregnancy. Found at <https://www.parents.com/pregnancy/my-life/emotions/coping-with-anxiety-and-depression-during-pregnancy/>, accessed 3/4/2019.
7. Earls, MF, Yogman, MW, Mattson, G, & Rafferty, J. Incorporating Recognition and Management of Perinatal Depression Into Pediatric Practice. *Pediatrics*: Volume 143:1. January 2019. Found at <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/1/e20183259>, accessed 3/4/2019.
8. Yu, W. Parents. Why Some Pregnant Moms Are Depressed. Found at <http://www.parents.com/pregnancy/my-life/emotions/why-some-pregnant-moms-are-depressed/>, accessed 3/4/2019.
9. American Pregnancy Association. Depression in Pregnancy. Found at <http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-health/depression-during-pregnancy/>, accessed 3/4/2019.
10. Cohen, M. Parents. Understanding Your Prenancy Emotions and Mood Swings. Found at <http://www.parents.com/pregnancy/my-life/emotions/mood-swings1/>, accessed 3/4/2019.