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Pregnancy: A journey begins

Couples planning to start a family look forward to their first pregnancy with apprehensive excitement and a sense of adventure. They share visions of a perfect, smiling Gerber baby, kids playing with dolls and/or trucks, attending soccer and ball games, then on to weddings and grandchildren.

Soon after pregnancy is confirmed, reality sets in. The exuberant expectant mom who envisioned being full of energy, continuing to work and staying fit on a closely monitored diet, is tired, nauseous and exhausted. She is suddenly anxious. Pregnancy hormones ravage her body, causing significant aches and pains. Where she had expected to feel enthusiastic and positive about her condition, she feels guilty that she is not.

Pregnancy is fraught with daily worries. Is the baby OK? Will I be OK? Is the baby normal? Will I be a good parent? Is this place big enough for all of us? How will we survive economically if I work less? How can anybody love a body that looks like this?

The soon-to-be dad, unaccustomed to his new status, may be confused by his partner's mood swings, anxieties and ambivalence. He may wonder what brought about this change in attitude in the mother of his child? Didn't we both want to be pregnant? Why is she so anxious when we've talked about this for years?

Expectant dads try to be comforting but always seem to say the wrong things. Somehow, their efforts to discuss "mom" issues, validate feelings, sympathize with aches and pains and attempt to be reassuring frequently fall on deaf ears.

New parents-to-be need to accept that this is but the beginning of the journey. A third household member is on the way. The twosome is about to become a threesome, and roles and relationships change. However, the family that plans ahead, openly shares feelings and accepts that all new families go through this is far ahead of the game. Those who keep to themselves, bottling up worries

and negative thoughts and feeling they are "abnormal" are destined for unhappiness and parental discontent.

- Pregnancy doesn't go on forever, but it does last a very long time. Prospective parents may try the following strategies to relieve prenatal stresses:
- Accept that pregnancy is not a disease. Continue with normal daily exercise, work and social activities, as long as they feel comfortable.
- Talk a lot. Share concerns and support each other's views. Understand that each parent-to-be has his or her own personality and comes to this new life experience from a different perspective. What creates anxiety for one expectant parent may be a walk in the park for the other. Attempting to get on the same page is good practice, because, once the baby arrives, a well-functioning team with a coordinated game plan makes a big difference.
- From early in your pregnancy, seek out and follow your obstetrician's good medical advice.
- Pick a pediatrician before the third trimester. Should the baby arrive early, that pediatrician will be there for you, and it will be one less thing to worry about.

Every parent wants and needs something a little different from his or her pediatrician, and each pediatrician and pediatric office has a personality of its own. Call and make an appointment for a prenatal visit, take a look around the office and ask lots of questions before you make your choice. Ask friends for recommendations and go to the American Academy of Pediatrics Web site (www.AAP.org and click on Find a Pediatrician) for an expanded list of those near you, and for assurance that the doctor is well trained.

- Lastly, enjoy your private time together and dream of your future as parents.

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