

Transcript Details

This is a transcript of an educational program. Details about the program and additional media formats for the program are accessible by visiting: <https://reachmd.com/programs/advances-in-womens-health/ppd-prevention-mental-health-pregnancy/56563/>

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A Window for PPD Prevention: Addressing Mental Health During Pregnancy

Announcer:

This is *Advances in Women's Health* on ReachMD. Today, Dr. Susan Zink will be explaining how treating mood and anxiety disorders during pregnancy can help prevent postpartum depression. Dr. Zink is a board-certified reproductive psychiatrist at EleMental Integrative Psychiatry in Linwood, New Jersey. Let's hear from her now.

Dr. Zink:

There are so many things that we can do to improve prevention of postpartum depression and its treatment. If we think about the risk factors of developing postpartum depression, the biggest risk factor is a history of depression or anxiety before pregnancy. And certainly, if there's a history of a perinatal mood or anxiety disorder in a prior pregnancy, that really increases the risk for another episode of a postpartum mood or anxiety disorder. So understanding that can help to prevent another episode, so that a woman can get treatment, ideally, during pregnancy, which is the best way to prevent postpartum depression.

I think it's a challenging decision for women to decide to treat a depression or anxiety problem during pregnancy. And it is really intuitive to understand that a medication is a potential exposure to a developing baby, but I think it's less intuitive to understand that the illness itself is also an exposure. So raising awareness about the risks of not only medication, but the risks of untreated illness is really important. And often, the risk of untreated illness is higher than the risk of medication.

Medications, especially antidepressants like SSRIs—and even SNRIs and some of the older antidepressant medications—have a lot of reassuring safety data. The SSRIs, for example, have no evidence to suggest that they increase the risk of birth defects or long-term effects on neurodevelopmental outcomes in children. But, on the other hand, we also have a lot of evidence to say that untreated depression and anxiety during pregnancy can increase the risk for things like preterm birth, low birth weight, and even some longer-term neurodevelopmental outcomes, like increased risk of depression, anxiety, and maybe even autism for children who are exposed to untreated illness during pregnancy. And that probably has something to do with the hypothalamic pituitary axis, the stress response axis in the body. Depression and anxiety can be very stressful on the body.

So I think it's really important to raise awareness about the risks and benefits of medication during pregnancy, because treating depression and anxiety during pregnancy is one of the best ways to prevent postpartum depression.

Announcer:

That was Dr. Susan Zink discussing perinatal depression and anxiety treatment to help prevent postpartum depression. To access this and other episodes in our series, visit *Advances in Women's Health* on ReachMD.com, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. Thanks for listening!