

Persons Who Want to Get Pregnant

Facts for Prescribing Practitioners

This fact sheet is for mental health practitioners who are caring for persons with mental health or substance use conditions who want to become pregnant.

Many people with mental health or substance use conditions have healthy pregnancies and babies. However, these conditions can complicate pregnancy and may have harmful effects on pregnant and postpartum individuals and their infants when left undetected, undiagnosed or untreated. They are one of the leading causes of maternal mortality and pregnancy-related deaths, exceeding all other causes of death during the perinatal period. Of these deaths, an estimated 84% are preventable. In addition, untreated mental and substance use conditions during and after pregnancy can affect factors such as pre-term births, small-for-gestational-age-offspring, parent-child bonding and breastfeeding. Persons with mental and substance use conditions who want to become pregnant might have concerns and questions about their symptoms and treatment during pregnancy.

Information to collect from your patients

- Current and past medical history
- Any concerns about becoming pregnant or becoming a parent
- Current and past pregnancy history, including previous attempts to get pregnant, infertility, miscarriages, fetal or infant losses, and medical, obstetrical or mental health complications during pregnancy
- Current and past psychiatric history
- Current and past prescribed or over-the-counter medications, vitamins and supplements and any side effects
- Current and past alcohol, smoking or vaping (tobacco and marijuana) and other substance use
- Available support system (e.g., family, friends, community)
- Economic or financial issues, including housing stability, food security and job security
- Current or past relationship conflicts and history of intimate partner violence
- If they have other health practitioners involved in their mental health care (e.g., social worker, counselor, faith-based advisor)

- If they have other health practitioners involved in their medical care (e.g., primary care practitioner, obstetrician/gynecologist)
- Any culture-specific preferences or needs (e.g., need for an interpreter)

Things to do

- Actively listen, validate, and address the person's concerns and feelings and encourage them to reach out if they have concerns or experience symptoms.
- Discuss the importance of mental health care during pregnancy and the postpartum period.
- Discuss the risks and benefits of starting, stopping or continuing psychotropic medications during pregnancy. If you are not a practitioner familiar with prescribing psychotropics during pregnancy, we recommend that you consult with a psychiatrist or other prescribing practitioner with expertise in this area.
- Discuss the risks of alcohol, tobacco and other substance use during pregnancy and advise that there are potential interactions with current medications.
- Provide psychoeducation on mental health and pregnancy.
- Obtain consent to release information to obstetrical and/or primary care practitioners.
- Provide follow-up on a treatment plan to the primary care practitioner and recommend preconception counseling.
- Refer to support services (e.g., social worker) or support groups (e.g., National Alliance for Mental Illness [NAMI]) based on the person's needs.
- Encourage self-care: Manage stress with tools such as meditation or yoga, a healthy diet, exercise and enough sleep.

Resources for you

- Postpartum Support International
<https://www.postpartum.net/>
- Perinatal Psychiatry Access Program
<https://www.umassmed.edu/lifeline4moms/Access-Programs/>

- MGH Center for Women's Health
<https://womensmentalhealth.org/>
- MotherToBaby
<https://mothertobaby.org/>
- Food and Drug Administration
<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/development-resources/division-pediatric-and-maternal-health>

- Postpartum Support International
<https://www.postpartum.net/>
- MGH Center for Women's Health
<https://womensmentalhealth.org/>
- National Maternal Mental Health Hotline
<https://mchb.hrsa.gov/national-maternal-mental-health-hotline>
- National Alliance for Mental Illness
<https://nami.org/Home>

Resources you can share with your patients

- Planning for Pregnancy | Preconception Care | CDC
<https://www.cdc.gov/preconception/planning.html>
- Before, Between & Beyond Pregnancy - Women's Health Matters.
<https://beforeandbeyond.org/>
- Hear Her Campaign | CDC
<https://www.cdc.gov/hearher/index.html>

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