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## Emotional Changes of the First Trimester

*By Rebecca Pugh*

The primary process for the woman who has just discovered she is pregnant is the acceptance of this reality. She spends a great deal of the first trimester getting comfortable with the idea that she is pregnant. Each woman experiences pregnancy differently. Some are joyous, others surprised by an accidental pregnancy, and some pregnancies are a result of rape. Whatever the situation the woman spends the first trimester coming to terms with these circumstances. Most women are ambivalent toward the pregnancy, even if they were expecting the pregnancy. There may be feelings of anxiety, depression, and unhappiness. Some factors may encourage depression or non-acceptance such as fears of a deformed baby or previous miscarriages. The nausea and vomiting of morning sickness can lead to a feeling of helplessness and desperation. Many women begin to think, "If pregnancy is like this, who needs it!" These feelings need to be discussed with partners and the midwife. Women are often faced with new sexual challenges; nausea and vomiting, hormonal mood swings, and a fear of hurting the baby all curb her sexual appetite. Her partner will have to adapt and learn to understand, all feelings are o.k. and should be discussed. For most women this is only a time of adjustment and for nearly all healthy women this phase passes into a joyous acceptance of the pregnancy. If it does not it is important to seek counsel. It is even possible for the midwife to refer a potential client to doctors who perform abortion. Many women come to the midwife because they trust her for counsel, even if they do not want to continue the pregnancy. This is a reality when dealing with the first trimester.

They begin to come to terms with the realities of pregnancy; their world is forever altered. The notion is an abstract one, as she can't see any real changes in her body and may not feel any different at all. There is no separation of life; the baby is one with her. The next weeks are spent anxiously awaiting the signs of pregnancy such as a swollen belly and breasts. Many women experience the not so welcome sign of morning sickness, which actually helps to impress upon the woman that she is with child. She begins to think about becoming separate from her peer group, now she will have to take good care of herself, maybe stop drinking, and her freedoms will be limited greatly after the baby arrives. She is now different, somehow older. The strong hormonal fluctuations can lead to extreme emotions, as these normal feelings of separateness are transformed into rejection and the slightest conflict results in floods of tears. All of this heightened sensitivity also has an upside. The new pregnancy can result in a sense of deeper connection with the self and deeper connections with others. Her body becomes the source of amazement and she feels great appreciation for what she is capable of, bearing new life!

Many women find they seek more time alone and begin to experience intense dreams; they are filled with questions, if this is their first pregnancy, and are anxious to begin prenatal care in order to have them answered. At first, women keep the news of their pregnancies to themselves, a wonderful secret they share with a privileged few. As they adjust and the pregnancy becomes both a clinical and an emotional reality they are anxious to share the news, with everyone they meet!



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## Emotional Changes of the Second Trimester

The second trimester is characterized by a dramatic lack of symptoms. Most women have cleared the hurdle of morning sickness and they are feeling healthy and alive with life. Often they feel the best they have ever felt. It is still a time of relative freedom before the belly has grown large and notions of birth are still in the distance. This trimester is often divided into two periods, before quickening and after. Around 18 weeks the woman is expected to feel movement for the first time and this helps her to solidify the notion of self as mother and the baby as a separate life within her own. She begins to develop her own mothering instincts, creating a unique identity as mother, separate from her own mother. With this she may begin to examine her relationship with her mother, identifying traits she admires and those she wants to change. This is accompanied by a shift in her role from care receiver to care giver as she begins to care for her baby in utero. This shifting takes place in other aspects of her life as she begins to form new friendships with other pregnant women or those with newborns. It is important at this time to commune with other women in the same situation. This is a valuable time of sharing information, concerns, joys and fears. The pregnancy introduces her to an entirely new peer group, which may result in resentment from old friends.

During the second trimester women begin to daydream about their baby, what it will be like to be a mother, and how they will care for her. She begins to make plans for the kind of birth she wants. Having a natural childbirth or homebirth may result in some conflict with other, especially older, mothers or friends. Often expecting mothers feel as though they must defend their choices and this becomes exhausting. It is important to surround yourself with people who support the choices you have made and want to share positive birth stories, not negative ones. Pregnant women are incredibly sensitive and intuitive and have a deep sense of what is right for them and their baby. Even though people are concerned about her well-being, they may frighten or upset her. During the second trimester an expectant mother has enough worries of her own. A typical concern around this time is worry about something happening to her partner and being left to birth and raise a child alone. She does not need additional stress from horror stories about birth or "what if" stories. This is important to understand as a expecting mother, a caregiver, partner, or friend.

With regard to sexuality many women in their second trimester are feeling their libido return. Their swollen belly is not yet an obstacle and they are settling into their pregnancy, letting go of concerns such as possibly hurting the baby during intercourse. For many women sex takes on a new meaning, as there is no longer the fear of getting pregnant or anxiety over trying to get pregnant, which often means having sex on a rigorous schedule! The pregnancy is now more tangible for the male partner as well; he can see the growth of the belly and feel fetal movements. This is an important step in his coming to terms with the pregnancy and will better give him an understanding of what you are going through.

### References:

*The Natural Pregnancy Book* by Aviva Jill Romm  
*Holistic Midwifery* by Anne Frye