

# Women's health

## Time to acknowledge stress during pregnancy

More than half of all women expecting a baby are likely to experience stress, sometimes as early as the first trimester.

Dr Robyn Lloyd, an obstetrician and gynaecologist who practices on Sydney's Lower North Shore, knows how stressful pregnancy can be, particularly for career-minded women.

"Six months ago I had my second baby and I worked right up until the moment I had him," Dr Lloyd says.

"I think part of the reason I did that was because I was finding it quite hard to let go of my practice."

Still building her career, Dr Lloyd knew her professional momentum would cease as soon as she took leave. As the pregnancy continued, that knowledge alone also saw her stress levels increase.

"The stress took its toll and I ended up under enormous pressure as my baby was born prematurely," she says. "So I'm very empathetic with women and I understand what they're going through and how hard it can be to let go. It's like losing part of your identity."

Dr Lloyd says there's evidence to suggest about 54 per cent of pregnant women have antenatal anxiety for one reason or another.



Gynaecologist and obstetrician Dr Robyn Lloyd says women under a lot of stress are monitored closely and given supportive therapy.

Anxiety often starts in the first trimester, when women worry about how early to inform people, particularly colleagues and employers, that they're pregnant. "They worry

about the logistics of when to finish work and how to do it while still minimising any effects on their careers. And then, of course, there are financial stressors," she says.

Women worry about the health of their baby, the changes their bodies are undergoing, elements of childbirth itself and ensuring everything is in place at home before the baby arrives.

Women whose pregnancies are deemed high risk or those who have related fertility issues are often at greater risk of stress.

Having an obstetrician who is mindful that women have identities separate to that of being an expectant mother can assist those finding pregnancy stressful, Dr Lloyd says.

"I think as doctors, instead of seeing high achieving, functioning women, we often see them only as pregnant women.

"It's easy sometimes to forget that patients are also career women and wives and daughters.

Dr Lloyd build strong relationships with the women who come to see her, and provides support.

"I make sure that women whom you can see are under a lot of stress are monitored closely and given supportive therapy," she says.

That can be as straightforward as offering reassurance and listening, to providing more complex advice or referring women to counsellors.

She encourages women to have open and honest conversations with employers early in a pregnancy, so as to make clear their career plans on returning to work.

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- Preconception counselling
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- Early pregnancy complications
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- ECV (External Cephalic Version)

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- Colposcopy & Abnormal Pap Smears
- Contraception • Menstrual disorders
- Fibroids & polyps
- Prolapse • Ovarian cysts



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