

Heaven Under Your Feet

Pregnancy for Muslim Women

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Stress in Pregnancy

During pregnancy, everyday stressors can become aggravated. Not only do we have our normal worries, to be handled by a not-so-normal body and mind, we also have a whole new set of worries that come with being pregnant. The first thing to reassure ourselves with is that it is normal to worry and to be stressed at times in life, particularly when pregnant. Maryam عليها السلام, the mother of Isa عليه السلام, was under so much stress due to her pregnancy that she said:

Oh if only I had died before this time and were something discarded and forgotten!

(Surah Maryam 19:23)

She was worried because she knew how people would think the worst of her when she came, unmarried, with her newborn. The prophets of Allah and His righteous slaves, such as Maryam عليها السلام, suffer the greatest amounts of stress in this world. Their suffering and anxiety supersede ours by far:

Sa'd رضي الله عنه asked the Prophet ﷺ: "O Messenger of Allah, which of the people suffers the most distress?" He said, "The prophets, then those who come after them (in terms of status), then those who come after them. A man will be tested according to the strength of his faith. If his faith is strong, then the distress with which he is tried will be greater. If his faith is weak, he will be tested in accordance with the level of his faith. Distress will keep on befalling the slave until he walks on the face of the earth free from sin."

(Tirmidhi, Book of Asceticism)

So, strangely enough, we can find comfort in calamity and times of stress as these may well befall us due to Allah's ﷻ love for us and can be a means of purification for us. This is one of the first ways in which we can begin stress relief - to know how fortunate we are as believers during our times of trial:

Strange are the ways of a believer for there is good in every affair of his and this is not the case with anyone else except in the case of a believer, for if he has an occasion to feel delight, he thanks (Allah), thus there is a good for him in it, and if he gets into trouble and shows resignation (and endures it patiently), there is a good for him in it.

(Muslim, Book Pertaining to Piety and Softening of Hearts)

It is important to remember that everyday worries and anxiety will not damage your baby's health or development. Vivette Glover, professor of Perinatal Psychobiology at Imperial College, London, says: "It is also important to note that mood swings are common in pregnancy and that most mums-to-be will have times when they are worried."²⁸ Alhamdulillah, most women cope well with the physical demands on their bodies during pregnancy and with associated psychological changes.

Concerns arise for pregnant women who have persistent or chronic stress, particularly during the third trimester, or those who feel they are unable to cope with stress. Everybody knows that stress is bad for your health if it is maintained over the long-term. During pregnancy, stress may be harmful if it affects your behaviour. For example, women change eating habits under stress, such as eating too little or not choosing nutritious foods, and we all know that we should be eating well and healthily during pregnancy.

Also remember that because stress has a distinct biochemical pattern where particular hormones are released, our baby not only knows that we are stressed, but also shares the chemicals we produce in response to stress. The effects of this were seen in an analysis of over 2000 babies where it was found that the risk of low birth weight was significantly related to

²⁸ See Glover, V. and T. O'Connor (2002), Br J Psychiatry, 180: 389-391 and related comments in a U.K. BBC press release titled, "Mother's anxiety affects baby's brain" 31/8/2001

Only in the remembrance of Allah can the heart find peace.

(Surah Al-Ra'd 13:28)

Du'a During Labour

Many of us feel specially protected and directly looked after by Allah ﷻ during pregnancy. We may have often found our du'as being readily accepted. During labour, in our final hours of pregnancy, this bounty is extended to its full as our du'as are answered as never before. We implore Allah ﷻ with a reliance on Him alone, knowing that He is the One driving and controlling the entire process of birth, and the entire universe. We seek His help during our time of need as there is no one that we can turn to other than Him. This creates a unique and powerful sincerity that guarantees acceptance.

He Who responds to the oppressed when they call on Him and removes their distress.

(Surah An-Naml 27:62)

The faith, hope and dependence on Allah ﷻ during labour are difficult to match at any other time in life. It is an invaluable opportunity for du'a. Naturally, we beg Allah ﷻ to help us through labour and birth but we can also ask for much more:

One should appeal to Allah with firm determination for nothing is too much or too great for Allah to give.

(Muslim, Book of Oneness of Allah)

Let us not think it is too much to ask – Allah ﷻ can make our births easy. It may be a good time for du'a during the early stages of labour as it is less intense and we may be more able to focus on making du'a. Contractions last no longer than a minute or so and come quite regularly with rather pain-free minutes in between them. This means we can rest between them, make du'a and prepare for the next one. We can even use du'a as a means of getting through each contraction. During the earlier stages of labour we can also try to make du'a centred on all things other than giving birth and remember those who asked us to make du'a for them during this time. In the later stages of labour we may not be able to think past anything other than birth. However, some women report far less or

even no pain when at the pushing stage and are very focused so this may prove to be an amazing time for du'a or dhikr. Remember that these need not be said aloud, though controlling our breathing by taking Allah's name, or even saying "Allahu akbar" out loud may also be a great way to manage.

Something we may like to try during labour is sending salaam to the Prophet ﷺ because every time we say this, Allah ﷻ sends on us multiple blessings:

He who invokes blessings upon Allah's Messenger ﷺ once, Allah and His Angels shower seventy blessings upon him.

(Mishkat, Sending Salaam on the Prophet ﷺ and its Virtues)

An example of invoking blessings and peace upon the Prophet of Allah ﷺ:

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى
آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

Allahumma ṣalli 'alā Muḥammadin wa 'alā āli Muḥammadin kamā ṣallayta 'alā Ibrāhīma wa 'alā āli Ibrāhīma innaka ḥamīdum majīd

O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad as you had blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham. Verily you are the Praised, the Glorious.

There are many du'as that the Prophet ﷺ made during times of need (labour is one such time!). It would be particularly helpful to have such du'as written down as we are likely to find it easier to read something, or have it read to us, rather than recalling it from memory. There are many du'as we can use to help us through childbirth. Though these du'as are not specifically for labour they

He Who responds
to the oppressed
when they call on
Him and removes
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(Surah An-Naml 27:62)

encompass the circumstances that commonly arise in labour. A handy summary of the du'as in Arabic translated into English, along with the transliteration, is included at the back of this book and can be packed ready for when labour begins.

When planning for an easy labour and birth let us also remember this hadith:

Whoever wants Allah to answer his prayers during difficult times, should supplicate to Him more and more in times of ease.

(Tirmidhi, Book of Supplications)

So we can begin to sincerely make du'a now, whilst we are still pregnant, for Allah ﷻ to help us during labour and birth. We can also ask friends and family to make du'a for us too because our du'as for each other when apart are answered:

The supplication that gets the quickest answer is the one made by one Muslim for another in his absence.

(Abu Dawud, Prayer: Detailed Injunctions about Witr)

Safwan ibn 'Abd Allah reported, "I visited Abu Darda's house in Syria. I did not find him there but Umm Darda was present at the house. She asked, 'Do you intend to perform hajj during this year?' I replied, 'Yes.' She said, 'Do supplicate Allah for us, for Allah's Messenger ﷺ used to say, "The supplication of a Muslim for his brother in his absence is accepted when he makes a supplication for blessings for his brother, and the commissioned angel says, 'Ameen, May it be for you too!'"' I went to the market and met Abu Darda ؓ and he narrated a similar report from Allah's Messenger ﷺ."

(Muslim, Book Pertaining to the Remembrance of Allah)