

## tools for stress reduction

### Stress matters

With the many choices and changes people face as they prepare to have a baby, pregnancy can feel overwhelming and stressful. We consider stress and past stressful events an important part of your current health and your past health history. When a person has stressful events or has experienced trauma, their body produces stress hormones which can affect the body. This can lead to physical or mental health problems or unhealthy use of alcohol or other drugs. There are many things that we can do to protect our brains and our bodies from these harmful effects. The following tips can help you manage your stress.



**We are available 24/7 for you**

**Call the clinic if you are feeling any of the following:**

- Feeling sad, hopeless, worthless or helpless
- Feeling fear or worry, which may cause a fast heartbeat
- Feeling that life is not worth living
- Having repeated, scary and unwanted thoughts that are hard to get rid of
- **If you are in danger or feeling like you want to harm yourself or anyone else, call 911 right away.**



## Pay attention to what you feed your mind and your body

Take a break from the news, social media and late night google searches. If you notice you're feeling anxious as you read information about pregnancy, it's okay to press pause. You can always save your questions for your midwife.



## What you eat can affect your mood, for better or worse

For an extra mood boost, consider adding the following supplements to your diet: Omega 3 Fatty Acids (2 grams DHA, 4 grams EPA) and Vitamin D (minimum of 1,000 IU daily). Many foods also contain these nutrients.

## Exercise can be a powerful antidepressant

### Walk it out

Walking at a quick pace for 15-30 minutes a day can strengthen your heart and other muscles and increase endorphins (chemicals in your brain that improve mood). For added benefit, listen to your favorite music or call a friend while you walk. Being out in nature is also a great stress reliever.

### Prenatal Yoga

Yoga can help soothe common aches and pains of pregnancy. It also strengthens your muscles to help you prepare for labor and decreases stress hormones in the body. To find a list of yoga resources just ask your midwife!

### Anything counts!

Put on some music and dance, join an online zumba, barre or pilates class. You don't have to exercise 30 min in a row. Try breaking it up into ten minute sections three times a day. Talk to you midwife if you need suggestions



# Take your brain to the gym by practicing mindfulness

This practice of learning to pay a little more attention to what is happening right now on purpose and without judgment is often called mindfulness. Mindfulness is shown to decrease stress, increase positive emotions, improve sleep, reduce anxiety and depression symptoms and lower blood pressure among other benefits.

## Pausing to take a deep breath can help reduce stress

Give this square breathing technique a try:

- Sitting upright, with your feet flat on the floor, slowly exhale through your mouth, getting all the oxygen out of your lungs.
- Imagine that you are drawing a square in your mind, inhale slowly and deeply through your nose as you draw the first side of the square, counting to four very slowly in your head. Feel the air fill your lungs, one section at a time, until your lungs are completely full and the air moves into your abdomen.
- Hold your breath for another slow count of four as you draw the next side of the square.
- Exhale through your mouth for the same slow count of four, expelling the air from your lungs and abdomen. Be conscious of the feeling of the air leaving your lungs.
- Now, hold your breath for the same slow count of four as you close the square.

**For some additional guided meditations, take a look at these resources:**

- Perinatal Support Washington - Mindfulness and stress reduction resources specifically by and for people of color: [https://quilted.link/mindfulness\\_poc](https://quilted.link/mindfulness_poc)
- Mindful Birthing (pregnancy focused meditations in English and Spanish): <https://quilted.link/mindful>

## Support groups

Whatever you are feeling, someone else is likely feeling it too. Ask your Quilted Health care team to connect with other support groups in your area.