

SELF-CARE IN PREGNANCY

From Heart and Hands by Elizabeth Davis

Prenatal care is more than just the checkups you receive from your practitioner every few weeks. It is the care you give yourself each and every day! Here are some of the main components of self-care in pregnancy, with a rating system to help you see how well you are doing. Enter one of the following with each category:

- 4: Do this automatically, naturally
- 3: Do this consistently but with definite effort
- 2: Do this occasionally, with some resistance
- 1: Just can't seem to do this, or haven't thus far

NUTRITION

- Eat from the four basic food groups daily
- Take supplements/herbs that I know I need
- Drink at least two quarts of water, infusion, etc. per day
- Pay attention to my inner voice of hunger and respond accordingly
- Treat myself to something I know is especially good for me and the baby
- Indulge myself in favorite foods (that are also healthful) for pure pleasure

EXERCISE AND RELAXATION

- Get into the fresh air and (if available) sunshine daily
- Do something to work up a sweat each day
- Stretch out my back, legs, shoulders, and neck daily
- Do exercises specific to pregnancy several times a week
- Dance, move rhythmically and freely with music
- Do vaginal exercises daily
- Completely let go at least once every day
- Practice progressive relaxation at least twice a week
- Have my partner (or someone else) massage me at least once weekly
- Dress in clothing that allows freedom of movement and is comfortable
- Deliberately release areas where I know I hold tension, several times daily
- Allow myself the necessary comforts to curl up and take it easy before bed

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

- Let myself cry whenever I feel like it
- As for support, acknowledgment, touch, sex from my partner whenever I need it (if applicable)
- Vent my frustrations before they become explosive
- Feel free to be loving and tender with my partner (if applicable) day-by-day
- Feel loving and tender with myself at least once each day
- Give myself time alone, and find new ways to enjoy it

INTELLECTUAL PREPARATION

- Read something on pregnancy at least once a week
- Formulate and ask questions of my care provider
- Take stock of my status in pregnancy by reviewing my daily or weekly activities and looking for areas that need improvement
- Discuss technical aspects of pregnancy, birth, and parenting with my partner and/or supporters on a regular basis
- Work on developing my birth plan by noting ideas and preferences as they arise
- Attend information sessions or film series on birth whenever possible

SOCIAL PREPARATION

- Meet with other pregnant women at least once a week
- Talk to mothers of infants or pregnant women in public places
- Observe infant behavior and family interaction whenever possible
- Ask for concrete support from friends and relatives for needs in pregnancy and postpartum
- Think about the changes having a baby will bring and formulate ways to adapt
- Support my partner (if applicable) in talking to other new parents, reading about parenting, or discussing the baby with me

There are several different ways to score this exercise. First add up your total score for each section. This will give you a general idea of areas where you are strong and those where you could use improvement. Your overall score can be viewed as follows:

110-144: yes, you are enjoying being pregnant and are taking good care of yourself.

80-109: you are doing well enough, but could stand to focus a bit more on the pregnancy. Look carefully at your areas of resistance, and see what you can do to discipline or motivate yourself more.

36-79: well, perhaps you are very busy with other things, but you definitely need to give your pregnancy some attention. Try combining an activity where you scored low with one where you scored high. For example, if you get outside every day but can't seem to drink your herbal preparations, take something to drink with you on your walk.

You'll feel much better if you care for yourself regularly.