Hello antenatal anxiety.

Having a baby can be both an exciting and challenging time for some people, especially if you add anxiety into the mix. While a certain amount of worry, stress is normal, it's not normal if anxiety is causing you to worry excessively and is having a significant impact on your life.

How common is antenatal anxiety?
Up to 1 in 10 women experience anxiety during pregnancy and up to 15% in the postnatal period. There are a number of factors that can contribute to anxiety increasing or developing, let's take a look at these.

These include:

• Your personal way of thinking and coping
• Previous personal history of anxiety and/or depression
• Family history of mental illness
• Previous reproductive stressors (infertility, IVF, miscarriage, termination, stillbirth)
• Difficult or complex pregnancy
• Birth trauma
• Premature or sick baby
• Pre-existing physical illnesses
• Financial stress
• Relationship stress
• Family violence
• Lack of social support
• History of childhood trauma or neglect
• Isolation and lack of social connections
• Loss and grief issues

People that have a combination of the above factors will increase their chances of developing anxiety, if you fit into this group, please make your LMC aware so she can help support you and put some support services in place if needed. People who have experienced anxiety prior to becoming pregnant may find that their symptoms worsen during pregnancy.

The signs and symptoms of antenatal anxiety can vary from person to person and may include:

• Worrying thoughts that keep coming into your mind – like worrying that something may be wrong with your baby
• Panic attacks – these are outbursts of extreme fear and panic that 'take over your body' and leave you feeling out of control
• Constantly feeling restless, 'on edge' and irritable
• Feeling tense in your muscles and tight in your chest
• The development of obsessive or compulsive behaviours
• Abrupt mood swings
• Feeling constantly sad, low, or crying for no obvious reason

Bellies to Babies

Living with anxiety symptoms and trying to manage intrusive, anxious thoughts can be exhausting. Seek help early, so you can take steps to get anxious thoughts and feelings under control before your baby arrives. It is easy to feel guilt and shame and this can get in the way of seeking the help you need but it's important that you do.

There is a range of treatment options that can be discussed with your GP, LMC or health care provider from medication approved for use during pregnancy to counselling. Along with social support in your community, speaking with someone who has been through a similar experience (peer support).

Asking family and friends to help may be difficult at first, but I'm sure they will be more than happy to help out. If you don't have a great support network close by, it's important that you actively seek and develop this, there are plenty of community groups of varying topics such as a dance group, book club and online mum chat groups. Looking after your physical health is equally as important, this includes eating healthy meals and lots of water, along with this, plan an enjoyable physical activity each day, this could be a walk around your neighbourhood with your partner after dinner. Sleeping well will help improve thoughts and feelings, this can be difficult as your pregnancy progresses so add in a couple of naps during the day (bliss!). Finally, practice and /or find techniques to reduce stress such as relaxation, pregnancy massage, deep breathing or starting a new hobby may help.

If you develop anxiety, know that you are not alone. Having antenatal anxiety is not going to make you a 'bad parent'. In fact, seeking help early leads to a faster recovery with less impact on you, your relationship with your baby, partner, and family - be assured that many others have come through this experience to find joy and fulfillment as a parent.