

# Vivid pregnancy dreams & nightmares!

As if the pregnancy symptoms that hit during waking hours — from morning sickness and body aches to strange food cravings and bouts of insomnia — weren't enough, many women also experience vivid, weird dreams during pregnancy.

Feeling like you've been streaming some pretty strange Netflix shows while you're sleeping these days? Something's definitely on your mind, and it's making you dream up a storm? Even if you're normally the type who doesn't remember your dreams when you wake up, you may suddenly find you're elbowing your partner in the middle of the night to recount the details of your latest wacky dream. Dreams may be so richly detailed and vivid that you may wake from them wondering, was that really a dream? While they may make you feel like you're losing your mind, pregnancy dreams are healthy and normal.

## **When do pregnancy dreams start?**

Of course it's possible to have pregnancy dreams at any point during pregnancy, and plenty of women report strange dreams early on. That said, many mums find pregnancy dreams peak during the third trimester as sleep is more disrupted and they increasingly find themselves imagining what life with a new baby will be like.

## **What causes pregnancy dreams?**

It's easy to blame hormones for your wildest pregnancy dreams and they almost certainly contribute to your dream frequency and intensity. But there are other theories, too. First of all, you've got a ton on your mind these days — and dreams are one way your subconscious works through it all and comes to terms with the impending changes in your life. They can also be an outlet for the many conflicting emotions — ambivalence, trepidation, anxiety, excitement, joy — you're feeling about becoming a mother but maybe uneasy expressing any other way. We all usually cycle through different levels of sleep during the night. Most nights, you'll go from drowsiness to light sleep, then on to rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, and finally into a deep sleep. Dreams usually happen during REM sleep, but we usually cycle back through light sleep and drowsiness before waking up, which means we don't always remember our dreams. During pregnancy there's more likely to be something that brings you to the surface and wakes you up, disturbing your sleep cycle. Whether it's leg cramps, needing the loo or just trying to get comfortable, something's likely to keep you from your deepest slumber. Having your sleep interrupted makes it more likely that you'll remember your dreams. That's why it seems as if you're having more dreams, and because you're remembering them so clearly, they seem particularly vivid!

## **What do my pregnancy dreams mean?**

It's often said that dreams express your subconscious worries, so your night-time adventures may represent your deepest concerns about having your baby. You may have a panicky dream in which you leave your newborn baby unsupervised, lose her altogether, or fumble a simple task such as changing a nappy. These scenarios may signal you're fearful of the demands of being a mum, but they certainly don't mean you're going to struggle. So, stop beating yourself up for these normal insecurities.

Dreaming that you're running away, falling from a great height, or trapped in a room may express your concern about losing your freedom. Other common dreams reflect concerns over changes in your looks or in your relationship, what your baby will look like, or whether you're prepared enough to be a mum.

## **What can you do about vivid dreams during pregnancy?**

Remember that dreams have no bearing on reality. A dream that you can't feed your baby may indicate that you're worried about taking care of a newborn, but it certainly doesn't mean that you won't be a good mum. Although such dreams can be disturbing, regard them as an opportunity to identify your inner thoughts and feelings. Have an open and honest conversation with your partner, family and friends so they have an understanding of what is concerning you. Once you examine your fears, you can often confront them openly.

## **Having trouble going back to sleep again after a vivid dream?**

When a vivid dream or nightmare wakes you up, the shock can make your heart pound. You may feel scared, disturbed or upset. If you find it hard to get the images out of your head and to go back to sleep, there are several options that may help: Keep a notebook by your bed. Write down any dreams that you remember and try to record your feelings about them. This can help any worries pass from your unconscious to your conscious mind, so that you can deal with them directly. Use muscle relaxation to relax your muscles. Tense and release each muscle in your body, starting with your toes, working your way slowly up your body, ending with your forehead. Breathe deeply and rhythmically to help lower your heart rate. With your mouth closed, breathe in slowly through your nose and gradually fill your lungs with air. Hold for one second before exhaling through your nose to the count of four, repeat until you feel yourself relax. Get out of bed and do something else. Reading or listening to quiet music can help you relax, but keep lights dimmed. Avoid watching TV and using your phone or laptop, as this may make it harder for you to drop off later. Use guided imagery. Picture yourself lying on a warm, sandy beach or strolling through a field of wildflowers. Giving yourself time to relax and wind down before dropping off to sleep again means you're less likely to return to the same bad dream.

## **If you keep thinking about your vivid dream or nightmare.**

It's normal to wake from a vivid dream or nightmare with feelings of extreme fear, distress or anxiety. But sometimes a dream can feel so real it can stay with you during the next day and maybe hard to shake off. You might find yourself replaying the dream repeatedly, or you may have a general feeling of anxiety or sadness because of your dream.

Here are a few tips that might help: Write down a description of the nightmare and think of a way to change it, maybe by giving it a positive ending. At various points in the day, spend a few minutes imagining this altered version of the dream. Concentrate on living in the present moment and take pleasure in the little things around you. Focus on what you can feel, smell, hear and see. Talk to your partner or a friend. If you're having upsetting dreams about your pregnancy or birth, you can even talk to your LMC or other pregnant friends. Sharing your worries may help to put them into perspective, as well as giving you a chance to raise any concerns. Boost your emotional and mental wellbeing, a good night's sleep may be easier to come by if you've had some exercise, so try walking or swimming in the afternoons. To keep your mind calm, indulge in plenty of relaxation, such as taking a long soak in the bath or listening to some soothing music.

Though pregnant women are usually the ones who dream vividly, you may find your partner is also having memorable dreams about the changes that lie ahead of you both. Make time to talk to each other about your dreams, and you may find that it's a useful way to discuss your hopes and fears. You may even get a good laugh out of them.