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The MS Messenger

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Spring is here! MS & Pregnancy; Top 10 questions for before and after delivery

By Allison Lipnick, LMSW

Clinical Social Worker, Maxine Mesinger Multiple Sclerosis Clinic, Baylor College of Medicine

Spring is definitely upon us and what comes to my mind are new beginnings! I have had many questions recently related to Pregnancy and MS so I thought I'd bring up the Top 10 related to before and after delivery.

While there are several places to get this information, I would caution you to only rely on information from reliable sources such as MS Society, MSF & MSAA as well as your physician's office.

I have compiled information from a couple of places which I will reference for you in case you would like further information.

1. Should I get Pregnant? This decision is one best made between you, your partner and your physician. So you have made the decision to start a family, depending on the stage of your MS, your physician can help you and your partner determine when best to stop your MS medication and begin the process of getting pregnant.

2. Will I have problems getting pregnant because of my MS? According to MS University & Teva Neuroscience, "There is no evidence that MS interferes with basic fertility in men or women or that it leads to increased number of other pregnancy-related problems."

3. How will the pregnancy affect my MS? In a recent article from the MS Foundation about Pregnancy for Women with MS they state that "For reasons still not entirely understood, pregnancy allows the body to enter a mildly immunosuppressive state. This means that during pregnancy, a woman naturally achieves this state that is usually achieved artificially with some medications. This could be the reason for reduced disease activity during pregnancy. Many women with MS feel exceptionally well, especially during their third trimester, when relapse rates are at an all-time low. On the other hand, fatigue, especially during the first three months, constipation and urinary tract infections may be bothersome for some women."

4. How does pregnancy work with my MS medication? Together with your physician, you will be able to determine when to stop, what to stop and what is safe to

continue related to your MS medications. I can guarantee you that during any pregnancy medical professionals encourage taking as few medications as possible during pregnancy due to research that may not be complete about some drugs and their potential effect on pregnancy.

5. Will my MS affect the delivery or labor? Teva Neuroscience states that "Several studies have repeatedly demonstrated that pregnancy, labor and delivery are no different in women who have MS than in women who don't."

6. What are the chances my baby will have MS? MSF article states, "The risk of your child developing MS, although higher than the general population, still remains low. While there is some increase in the risk to children with a family history of the disease, the actual risk is small (95% chance that MS will NOT occur). At this time, there is no way to diagnose MS or assess the MS risk in a particular infant before or after birth."

7. What does my MS have to do with my Post Partum Period? Studies have shown that you may be at a higher risk for relapse or exacerbation after pregnancy. "During the initial 6 months after delivery, 20% of women will experience a relapse. Due to this heightened risk, you may choose to start or re-start one of the immunomodulating drugs right after your baby is born. If you are employed, you may require a longer maternity leave than the average 6-8 weeks that is customary in the U.S., because relapses occur most frequently between the fourth and eighth weeks of your postpartum period." While exhaustion can be common for new mothers, you must be careful not to ignore your fatigue. It is very critical that you focus on caring for yourself, resting and feeding your new baby. Practice good self care and delegate tasks to other household members such as shopping, social events and other household tasks (MSF, 2005).

8. Should I breastfeed? The decision whether or not to breastfeed is a personal one. Breast milk not only provides optimal nutrition, but also eliminates the nuisance

of bottle preparation. If you do choose to breast feed, be consistent with all feedings during the first two weeks. This will help generate a steady and sufficient flow. After this period, you can pump and store your milk or use formula so that your partner can handle the nighttime feedings. This is the best way you can get sufficient rest that is needed for a new mom with MS. According to current medical research, there is no elevated risk of exacerbation caused by breastfeeding (MSF, 2005). Currently, none of the 4 medications treating RRMS has been approved for use during breastfeeding. It is very important to talk with your doctor about what types of treatment you should be taking while breastfeeding (MS University, 2003). This leads me to my next question.

9. When do I re-start meds? There are 2 categories of meds used to treat MS. There are those used to treat symptoms, such as bladder infections. These medications are often safe to continue during pregnancy, but ALWAYS check with your doctor first. The immunomodulating agents that reduce disease activity such as Avonex, Betaseron, Copaxone and Rebif have not all been conclusively tested as to their effects on an unborn child. They might increase the risk of miscarriage. Depending on if you are planning on breastfeeding, you may, with your doctor's consent, resume your medication immediately after delivery.

10. Will my MS affect my ability to care for my baby? As mentioned before, it is important to be aware of your fatigue and to know when to delegate tasks to other family members to get help. Make rest a top priority during your entire pregnancy and after delivery. Try to communicate with your partner, remember while this is exciting and possibly scary to you, it is likely equally exciting and scary to your partner. Communication will ensure that both your needs are met during this time. You may have had some practice having MS already and knowing the unpredictability of that, take those skills and apply them to parenthood. Your preparedness will help reduce stress and fatigue later making it possible to enjoy the new addition to your family. (References on Page 4)

Are you ready for the Summer Heat!

Here are some tips managing the heat:

Get your cooling devices.

There are several companies that manufacture cooling equipment from vests to wrist bands.

Apply through the MSAA for assistance.

Think these are expensive and out of reach? The National MS Association of America provides financial

assistance and will purchase these cooling devices for you if you meet financial eligibility. All you need is an application and an RX from your Dr.

Be good to yourself.

Make sure you know the limits of your heat capability. If you begin to feel overheated, stop take a rest and then begin again.

Check if the places you are going will have air conditioning before you go, if not remember to take your cooling gear.

Fur Further Questions about eligibility or to look at the devices before you purchase, See Allison the Social Worker at the Clinic or call her at 713-798-4470.

Troubleshooting

MEDICATION

Avonex/Tysabri-MS Activesource
800/456-2255

Betaseron-MS Pathways
800/788-1467

Rebif-MS Lifelines
877/447-3243

Copaxone-Shared Solutions
800/877-8100

MS INFORMATION & SUPPORT

NMSS 713/526-8967

MSAA 800/532-7667

COOLING DEVICES

MSAA Cooling Equipment Distribution Program-call or download application from website <http://msassociation.org/programs/applications/>

MSF Cooling Program http://www.msfocus.org/programs_coolapp.php

MRI MSAA MRI Institute-call or download application from website

<http://msassociation.org/programs/applications/>

DISABILITY

NMSS 713/526-8967

Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)

866/281-1804

COUNSELING Family Services (several locations, sliding fee scale) 713/861-4849

NMSS 713/526-8967 option 2, ask for Vickie or Nan

-can assist with up to 6 counseling visits

EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES NMSS 713/526-8967 option 2, ask for Vickie or Nan

CAREGIVER SUPPORT

NMSS 713/526-8967

National Family Caregiver Association 800/896-3650

Meet The Staff: Clinical Social Worker



Allison Lipnick, LMSW has 2 years of experience as a clinician and educator in the area of chronic illness and rehabilitation before becoming the Clinic Social Worker here at the MMMSC. She is the newest staff member to the MS Clinic and comes with great enthusiasm and excitement for the field of MS. In addition to providing therapy and care management services to persons with MS in the Clinic, she volunteers at the MS Society in various Chapter Programs as

well as organizes speaking opportunities in the community for outreach and education. She is a two time University of Houston Cougar, first receiving her BA in Psychology in 2002 then Graduate Social Work degree in 2006. She also serves on the Graduate College of Social Work Alumni Association as a Board Member and is a community member of the following associations: Houston Gerontological Society, I-45 Coalition, American Group Psychotherapy Association, The Gray Panthers and Sigma Phi Omega. She is very happy to be a new member of this wonderful family here at the Mesinger Clinic and looks forward to meeting each of you.

Self-help group for patients who speak Spanish

Grupo de apoyo para pacientes con Esclerosis

Multiple de habla-espanol

We are in the process of developing a self help group meeting for persons with MS and their caregivers who primarily speak Spanish.

If you or someone you know has an interest in such a group, please call

Mary Gonzalez @ 713-864-6568 or email her at megigf@aol.com.

Estamos iniciando un grupo de apoyo para los pacientes con EM y sus proveedores de atencion. Si usted or alguna per-

sona que usted conoce esta interesado en este grupo por favor llame a Mary Gonzalez al 713-864-6568 or email

megigf@aol.com.

From Tracey Reeves, LCSW, MSCS

To the physicians, staff and clients of the Maxine Mesinger Multiple Sclerosis Clinic:



I thought you might enjoy this picture of my new boss...

It has been my privilege to know and work with you for the past 4 years. You are all remarkable and my time at the clinic has been the most rewarding of my 17 years as a practicing social worker. Thank you for allowing me into your lives and I will miss our day to day interactions.

I hope to see you while continuing to serve as a volunteer for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Warm regards,

Tracey Reeves LCSW, MSCS

Depression

Depression is more prevalent in persons with MS than in the general population. It is a tremendously disabling condition that is totally treatable. It is important know the signs and symptoms of depression:

- Feeling sad or empty most of the day
- Being irritable or tearful most of the day

- Not interested in usual activities
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Feeling restless or listless
- Fatigue
- Feeling worthless

- Inability to make decisions or concentrate
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide or planning suicide

If you, or someone you know, exhibits many of these signs, talk to your physician or contact the Crisis Intervention of Houston hotline @ 713/468-5463.

BCM

Baylor College of Medicine

Maxine Mesinger
Multiple Sclerosis
Clinic

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NB100
Houston TX 77030

Phone: 713-798-6296
Fax: 713-798-0115

Comments or suggestions? Contact
Allison Lipnick @ 713/798-4470.

References for MS & Pregnancy Article on Page 1.

MSF, Pregnancy for Women with Multiple Sclerosis (2005) http://www.msfocus.org/publication_articleDetails.php?ID=25

"Making life livable for persons with MS."

MS University, Multiple Sclerosis & Pregnancy Fact Card (2003)

National MS Society Corner

PEARLAND ADAPTIVE YOGA CLASSES

There are two classes now offered by a registered yoga therapist at the West Side Events Center @ 2150 Country Place Parkway every Saturday and sponsored by the NMSS:

- **Hatha Yoga which is a standing class from 10am-11:15am.**
- **Chair Yoga which is a sitting class from 11:30am-noon.**

If you have any questions or need more information, please call Lissa @ 713/526-8967, option 2.

Save the dates!

Walk MS 2008 Fall Series

September 20

Walk MS Kemah

Kemah Boardwalk - 1 mile and 5K routes

September 27

Walk MS Katy

Katy Mills Mall - 1 mile loop in the mall

Walk MS The Woodlands

Panther Creek - 5 mile route

Run MS The Woodlands Panther Creek - 5 mile route

Corporate Challenge and Awards

September 28

Walk MS Downtown Houston

Sam Houston Park - 1 mile and 5K routes

There is no registration fee nor is there a minimum donation. The first prize level starts at \$100 in donations which is the official T-shirt. We hope that everyone that participates "walks" away with the T! www.walkmstexas.org