

May 2009 - PREGNANCY ETIQUETTE

A pregnant woman is the epitome of the “Empowered Woman”. For the sake of this column and of American readers, pregnancy related problems of the Third World will be left to a future article. Whether a woman chose to become pregnant or not is irrelevant to the body changes that she will undergo. Let us get some definitions straight: pregnancy is a forty week period from the date of the last period or thirty eight weeks from the day of conception. Since most couples do not know when the exact day of conception was it is conventional to date a pregnancy from the day of the last menstrual period. Doctors date the pregnancy in terms of weeks not months because each month has a different number of days. However, for those who insist on talking in terms of months, pregnancy lasts ten lunar months—a lunar month defined as 28 days. Delivery is at the end of the tenth lunar month. Furthermore, the forty week pregnancy is divided into trimesters: the first from day of last period to twelve weeks; the second from twelve weeks to twenty eight weeks and the last trimester from twenty eight weeks to delivery. Each trimester is characterized by specific body changes in the woman that reflect her hormonal status and that of the growing fetus and placenta. In the first trimester, hormones produced from the ovary from which ovulation occurred cause the initial nausea and vomiting, fatigue, breast tenderness and bowel changes. The fetus is in a growth spurt as organs are being formed and consumes huge amounts of sugars that cross over directly from the placenta. Hence, most women at this stage are ravenously hungry even if they throwing up frequently. In the second trimester, the growing uterus causes a decrease in hunger as the stomach of the woman is compressed, heartburn from this compression and from calcium deprivation, abdominal aches and pains from ligaments being stretched and possibly gall bladder problems from compression and cholesterol imbalances. Sore and leaking breasts, periods of faintness are common. In the final trimester, fatigue sets in from rising hormones, inability to sleep because of positional difficulties, frequent urination, wild dreams, achy legs, and fetal motion . If the first pregnancy, worry over the delivery process itself and, if not the first, worry over the other kids, the house, finances, marital relationships, etc. take a huge toll.

Now the point of all this and hence the title “Pregnancy Etiquette” is that most pregnant woman do not feel very well. They are thrilled with the little life being created within and overwhelmed by the very miracle of it BUT their noses are stuffy, they are nauseous, their breasts grow tender, they might have trouble eating, can’t sleep, legs hurt, are constipated, and very very concerned with body image. Most women are concerned that they either look too big or too small. Modern obstetrics relies not just upon the physician’s measurements of the uterus to determine size but ultrasound as well which correlates the date of delivery with the size of the fetus and determines without error the number of babies within the uterus. So, imagine if you will, a pregnant woman who goes to the grocery store or to the YMCA or to the gym and is told by well meaning people (some of which may have never met her): “my God, you are huge- you are having twins- the doctor is wrong- the baby will weigh twelve pounds, etc. etc..” These comments will usually provoked tears and worries about looking “whale like” and might even contribute to unrecommended binge dieting. Then there is the tall thin pregnant woman who hears the comment: “ are you sure you are pregnant? The doctor must be wrong—maybe you just have gas”. The woman might just be carrying that way and might indeed have just undergone a long period of infertility and has conceived by advanced technology so she too goes home crying and panicked that something is wrong. In years of practice I have heard these stories thousands of times. In most cases, she is exactly the size she should be when measured by an experienced and well trained person. Now I know that it is true that the people that make these comments are well intentioned and mean no harm and are authentically thrilled to see the creation of life before them. Some even lament that their very own reproductive days are behind them. So, a few words of advice: never ever touch a pregnant woman, unless invited to and especially not at the grocery store—it is offensive to most and an invasion of privacy and if you must say something just say “my you look lovely, pregnancy becomes you.” Then you have not only empowered the pregnant woman but yourself as well.

