

Abuse during Pregnancy

KEY POINTS

- Abuse is one person trying to control another with fear, violence, or bullying. Abuse can be physical, emotional, sexual, or economic.
- Abuse often starts or gets worse during a pregnancy, which puts both you and your unborn baby at risk. The longer you stay in an abusive relationship, the greater your risk of being badly hurt.
- Many states have toll-free, 24-hour domestic violence hotlines. You can also get help from The National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233.

Abuse often starts or gets worse during a pregnancy. This puts both you and your unborn baby at risk. People who abuse a spouse or partner are also likely to threaten or abuse their children. Protecting yourself and your child from abuse is one reason to leave a relationship.

What is abuse?

Abuse is one person trying to control another with fear, violence, or bullying. Abuse may take many forms:

- Physical abuse is an injury to your body:
 - Hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, pushing, stabbing, or choking
 - Beating you with objects such as a bat or cord
 - Burning you with hot water, cigarettes, or a stove
- Mental and emotional abuse may include:
 - Swearing or threatening to hurt you
 - Insulting you, making fun of you, or calling you names
 - Forcing you to do shameful or humiliating acts
 - Threatening to hurt your children or someone else if you don't do what the abuser wants
 - Hurting your pets or destroying your property
 - Keeping you locked up and away from other people.
- Sexual abuse includes forcing you to have sex or hurting your breasts or genitals.
- Economic abuse may include:
 - Refusing to let you work or harassing you while you are at work
 - Not letting you have money or a bank account
 - Stealing from you.

What is the cause?

Your partner may not want to share your time and attention with a child. The added stress of taking care of a child can make an abuser angry. A partner who responds to stress, frustration, or anger with violence may target your breasts and belly for punches or kicks to hurt you. The punches or kicks could hurt your baby.

Your partner may dislike the way your body looks in late pregnancy and this may trigger abuse.

What are the effects?

You may blame yourself even though the abuse is not your fault.

Stress caused by abuse affects your ability to take care of yourself during your pregnancy. You may try to relieve stress with unhealthy habits such as smoking, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and not eating a variety of healthy foods. You may not be able to sleep or relax. You may not get the medical care you need during pregnancy because of fear that your healthcare provider will find out about the abuse or because your partner won't let you get care.

Dangers to your unborn baby include:

- Miscarriage
- Low birth weight
- Premature birth
- Stillbirth (death of the baby before it is born)

If you have other children and they see family violence or are abused themselves, they can be deeply affected by it. They may have stomachaches, headaches, diarrhea, or problems with bed-wetting and sleeping. Often they have trouble in school. Children may come to think that violence is a way of dealing with problems. Abused children are more likely to get into an abusive relationship when they grow up.

How can I take care of myself and my unborn child?

The longer you stay in an abusive relationship, the greater the chance you, your baby, and any other children will be seriously injured or killed.

- Ask yourself if your relationship is safe.
- Understand that it is not your fault.
- Learn to recognize signs of possible violence before it occurs and get away from the abuser.

Have an emergency plan to get away if things get bad. Know where to get help such as:

- Crisis hotlines
- Rape crisis centers
- Domestic violence programs
- Shelters for abused adults and children

Know where you will go and how to get there at any time of day. If you feel you are in danger from your partner, take action. Keep the following items in an easy-to-find but safe place, so you can take them with you on short notice:

- Medicines
- IDs such as birth certificates, Social Security cards, health insurance cards, and driver's license
- Extra cash, your checkbook, savings account book, and credit cards
- Important documents such as welfare identification, insurance records, automobile titles, marriage license, address book, passports, or green cards
- Copies of legal documents such as protective orders or divorce or custody papers
- Extra set of car, house, office, and safety deposit box keys

Get out. Take your children with you.

Call the police or 911. Get medical care if you, your children, or your unborn baby have been hurt.

Where can I get help?

Many states have toll-free, 24-hour domestic violence hotlines. Look in your local telephone book or use the internet to find one in your area. If you are being abused, get help now.

For more information, contact:

- The National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-7233
<https://www.thehotline.org/>
- National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence
<https://www.nsvrc.org/survivors>
- Alliance for Children and Families
800-221-3726
<https://www.alliance1.org/>
- Baby Safe Haven
888-510-2229
- Love Our Children USA
888-347-KIDS (5437)
- Planned Parenthood National Hotline
800-230-7526
<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

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