TuSalud

Screening for Pregnancy Anxiety May Help Reduce Early Births

Research supports the need to measure pregnancy anxiety throughout entire pregnancy.

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Anxiety related to pregnancy and childbirth has been associated with shorter gestation times and earlier births, according to a new UCLA study.

It is common for doctors to screen for depression during pregnancy and postpartum, but this study's authors emphasize the need for additional evaluation for anxiety during early pregnancy. Also known as pregnancy-specific anxiety, this mood disorder is seen in Latina women at higher rates than other groups, according to the study.

Published in Health Psychology, the five-year study explored the ways maternal mood disorders and pregnancy-specific anxiety and stress impact pregnancy outcomes and infant development.

"The key finding in this new paper is that anxiety about a current pregnancy robustly predicted earlier birth measured in weeks of gestation," said UCLA psychology professor and lead study author Christine Dunkel Schetter in a UCLA news release. "Gestational length is one way of understanding the risk of preterm birth with attendant adversities for mother and child. This finding is consistent with our prior research and that of others."

Researchers investigated four different tools used to measure anxiety during pregnancy to see whether they assessed the same issues and whether any were better at predicting outcomes for the mother. The study included 196 pregnant women beginning at the first trimester and ending one-year postpartum. Participants checked in with researchers six times total—once per trimester and three times within the year after birth.

The study found that when used together in the third trimester, the common screening methods predicted delivery time. What's more, measuring anxiety in the first trimester using a measure of clinically significant anxiety called OASIS predicted earlier delivery, which could be useful with regard to prenatal care.

"We think it is important to know that anxiety about a current pregnancy is a potent psychosocial state that may affect birth outcomes," said Dunkel Schetter. "This and other studies suggest that we should be assessing anxiety in pregnant women. The brief clinical screener we used, the

OASIS, can be administered easily in early pregnancy with predictive validity.”

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