

High-Risk Pregnancy: Why Me?

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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Understanding and Managing a Potential Preterm Pregnancy

Every year, 1 million U.S. women with high-risk pregnancies are placed on bed rest to protect their developing babies. Despite that, every year, about 500,000 newborns – one of every eight – arrive too early, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Enduring a high-risk pregnancy can be an overwhelming experience of stress, fear and unknowns, leading to more questions than answers. Many of these moms adhere to strict regimes of bed rest; face major changes in lifestyle and relationships; and are subject to dozens of doctor visits and even surgery or medications to protect their unborn children. For them, birth may not be the joy-filled event most families expect.

Knowing those feelings all too well, research scientist Kelly Whitehead wrote *High-Risk Pregnancy: Why Me? Understanding and Managing a Potential Preterm Pregnancy* (www.hrwhy.com),

which is backed by fetal and maternal medicine specialist Dr. Vincenzo Berghella, a top pre-term birth researcher. Whitehead's first child died following his premature birth. During her next pregnancy, she spent 4½ months in bed worrying over and trying to protect her daughter.

The book is both a medical reference and provides emotional support for mothers-to-be, with Whitehead providing answers in layman's terms to the myriad medical questions families have. Whitehead also shares coping strategies she discovered, along with what she's learned through benefit of hindsight, and insights from other mothers.

- Try to enjoy being pregnant. Don't miss out on this experience because you're high-risk. Do the normal prego things, even if you have to modify them: Shop online, get a belly cast, shoot expanding-belly photos, and savor those kicks and body changes. Don't forget or stop dreaming about the actual birth and your desires for what it will be like. I regretted missing out on so much while carrying my daughter. Rather than enjoying the pregnancy, I kept focused on the end and my hope she would survive.

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- Don't let your emotions become your enemy. Say goodbye to guilt – this is not your fault! It's okay to be bitter, angry and upset at the world, and to hate “normal” pregnant women, but it isn't going to change anything. So go get mad, yell, and cry, and then move on.
- Pelvic rest sounds easy, but it isn't. It's not fun being forced to become a nun, so don't. There are still ways to enjoy intimacy; you just need to get creative. Think high school – remember how much fun necking was? Try body oil, a massage...whipped cream? Sexy lingerie is still hot, even if you're pregnant. Flaunt your new assets - they surely went up a cup size or two.
- Educate yourself about your situation. Don't go reading about every other possible scenario out there; you don't need to worry about problems that aren't a likely issue for you.
- Ask and you shall receive. It may sometimes feel as though people have forgotten about you, but the reality is they're busy and they have no idea what's it's like for you. If you want company, reach out and invite someone over.

“I know it's tough to be going through a high-risk pregnancy and living in fear every day,” Whitehead says. “Though this will be the toughest time of your life, many of us have been through it and now have our children. You can, too.”

“Keep your chin up and keep hoping. Healthy babies are born every day to families who've walked the same path.”

About Kelly Whitehead

Kelly Whitehead is a scientist-mom, who lost a preemie son and went on to have two high-risk pregnancies. She wrote *High-Risk Pregnancy: Why Me? Understanding and Managing a Potential Preterm Pregnancy* as an educational tool and emotional guide for those experiencing a difficult pregnancy and the providers who work with them. She is also a trained doula, birth advocate and spokesperson for Sidelines National High Risk Pregnancy Support Network. For more information, check out www.hrpwhyme.com.

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