



Perinatal Anxiety with Dr Agnes Higgins: Video 3

[00:00] MUSIC

[00:07] Hello and welcome to video three on perinatal anxiety. My name is Agnes Higgins and I'm Professor in Mental Health, in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, in Trinity College Dublin. In this video we're going to talk about developing a wellness plan. A mental health wellness plan is like a birth plan except it focuses on the strategies that you may use to support your mental health and emotional well-being.

[00:33] There are 10 things that I think you should consider including within your wellness plan and we're going to talk about them now.

[00:42] **Identify someone you can talk to.**

Connecting and talking with someone who cares about you is a good way to calm your worries and reduce anxiety. Talking about your worries can make them feel less threatening and overwhelming. Identify a person that will listen to you without judgement. Someone you can trust and someone that you can talk to on a regular basis for a period of time. Ask that person if it is okay for you to tell them any worries, feelings or scary thoughts you have. Also ask the person to help you to keep check on your anxiety. It is also important to give them permission and encourage them to tell you if they have any concerns about your mental health or if they think that you need to access professional help and support. In selecting this person, ask yourself whether you feel better or worse after speaking to that person, as it's important to give yourself permission to avoid people who are themselves worriers as they can make your anxious feelings worse.

[1:47] **Learn to notice how anxiety affects you.**

Knowing how anxiety impacts you and your relationships can help you to recognize when you need to seek help and support. You can watch video 1 & 2 to learn about anxiety, and I would also encourage you to listen to, or read the stories of women who have experienced anxiety. One woman's experience of anxiety and how it is expressed can look very different from another woman's. You may also ask your partner or close family member to review the videos so they can support you to monitor your mental health.

[02:26] **Know your risks.**

Anyone can experience anxiety in the perinatal period but there are some things that make it more likely. For example, if you have a past history of anxiety or a phobia or obsessive-compulsive disorder or depression. It increases your vulnerability during pregnancy and in the postnatal period. Experiencing a difficult or traumatic birth are having an ill or premature baby also increases your vulnerability. Not having good practical and emotional support from your partner or people around you may also be a risk factor. While these don't mean that you will



experience anxiety, they do increase your vulnerability. So, if you think you have an increased risk you need to consider who in the maternity team you need to tell so that they can ensure you get the necessary support during pregnancy, birth, and in the postnatal period.

[03:24] Practice strategies to soothe and calm your anxiety.

When your mind starts to race with worries distracting your mind can help, as it is difficult for your brain to focus on two things at the same time. So try listening to a favourite song, or even the sound of nature or try looking at some nice photographs as you may find that they can help. As anxiety also impacts in your physical body, practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga or meditation are effective ways of stopping anxiety getting out of control. Exercise, like walking, running, dancing, or cycling are natural anti-anxiety strategies as exercise in any form relieves tension and reduces stress hormones. How you think affects how you feel, so practicing self-talk can also help. Remind yourself that the feeling or thought that you are experiencing will pass. Also try to think of different interpretations to a situation that is making you anxious rather than jumping to the worst-case scenario are overestimating the danger in a situation, look at the facts for and against your thought being true.

[04:42] Accept and ask for help from family and friends.

We all need help and support at different times in our lives. Accepting and asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Speak with family and friends and discuss how they can support you, such as asking them to prepare some meals or help with household chores. Allow someone to take care of your baby for even an hour so that you can sleep or just get some time for yourself. Family and friends can be helpful by providing reassurance and letting you know that you are cared about.

[05:19] Create a sleep plan.

Anxiety can cause you to have difficulty sleeping which in turn will make your worries and anxiety worse. As lack of sleep and exhaustion lessens all our ability to handle stress. So you need to ensure that you get sufficient sleep.

[05:38] Plan ways you can get out of the house and meet other people.

While anxiety can sap your energy and can make going out or engaging in hobbies or activities that you enjoyed more difficult. In your plan think about ways that your family and friends can support you so that you have time away from your baby. Having time for yourself as well as having time to be with your partner without the baby can help nurture you and your relationship. Joining a breastfeeding group or a mother and baby group is also a good way to encourage you to get out of the house. Most importantly being able to speak with other women can be very reassuring when you realize that many new mothers share the same worries and experiences. They can also tell you about other resources that are available within the community.



[06:33] Avoid anxiety-inducing habits.

While drinking alcohol may help you feel relaxed for a short period of time as the effects wear off it will make your anxiety worse. It can all to impact on your sleep. Caffeine, whether in coffee or other caffeinated drinks, can also increase your heart rate, exacerbate you're jittery feelings and negatively impact on your sleep. Nicotine in cigarettes is also a stimulant therefore, it is best to avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine.

[07:07] Identify your professional supports.

When making your wellness plan, consider the mental health support resources that are available to you. If you have attended a mental health service or therapist for mental health issues in the recent past, you might consider linking back in with them. If you are currently attending a mental health service or therapists and are pregnant are planning a pregnancy, do discuss this with them so that they can advise you on the strategies to use during your pregnancy, labour and the postnatal period. If you are taking medication for anxiety, never stop the medication abruptly but always consult with your doctor about coming off medication. If you are not attending a mental health service, it may be worth while to find out what is available to you locally. Keep the details of all the professional sports that you have identified in a safe and accessible place, and consider giving a copy to your partner or trusted friend so that they have these details should you or they need to make contact with any professional.