

ask



# Dr Roshan Jain

Your *mental and emotional health* questions answered

**Q** I am 21 years old and suffering from Spina Bifida from birth. Lately, my lower back pain has worsened and it's disturbing my mood and sleep. I feel anxious, agitated and am beginning to lose hope. My neurologist has advised me to consult a psychiatrist, which has come as a surprise. I am not sure how this will help.

I suspect your specialist has already evaluated your back problem and offered necessary advice to remedy the pain with medication and lower back exercises. Referral to an allied speciality, especially psychiatry, may be for many reasons.

Firstly, he/she may want you to address psychological factors contributing to worsening of pain, particularly if there is no discernable deterioration of spinal condition or if the reported pain is disproportionate to your underlying problems. It is well established that long term back pain can be disabling and may affect mental wellbeing. Individual may suffer from stress, anxiety and depression, thereby making them emotionally fragile. This then leads to undue perception of pain.

Addressing the above factors via clinical counselling, supportive therapy and perhaps antidepressant medication can go a long way in abating your difficulties. Additionally, I would recommend a book called 'Full Catastrophe Living' which teaches about a psychological concept of mindfulness that helps in stress reduction. I use this therapy in clinic practice with profound beneficial effects. Keep an open mind, consult the advised specialist and see how you benefit. One

thing is for sure that you are unlikely to lose anything!

**Q** I am 21 years old, currently 7 months pregnant, expecting in 8 weeks. I am struggling to sleep for the past 2 weeks. The harder I try the more difficult it gets. Occasionally, I bleed from the nose and experience palpitations. Please suggest medications that I could take.

I must suggest that sleep is something that must come naturally and if it doesn't then there must be a reason for it. And when it gets worse, associated apprehension/anticipation of inability to sleep tends to worsen insomnia (poor sleep). Therefore, as you said, 'the harder you try the worse it gets'.

Pregnancy in latter half is associated with enormous bodily changes including weight and blood pressure. Some experience pregnancy induced hypertension, which may cause palpitation and insomnia. For others, there might be some restriction of breathing if weight has drastically increased contributing to agitated state.

Further, first time mother may begin to apprehend about delivery and managing the baby. If unattended, this can turn into an anxiety illness, which will need supportive intervention and education.

I suggest that you consider Sleep Hygiene - a variety of different practices that are necessary to have normal, quality night time sleep and full daytime alertness. Avoid napping during the day, as it affects quality of sleep at night; avoid mind-stimulating activity like drinking coffee/tea and eating a

large meal before going to bed; go for regular walks for daily exercise and keep active throughout the day to earn a good night's sleep; establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine; ensure pleasant ambience in the room; read motivational books before you sleep and consider a shower for relaxation.

Medications, especially sleeping and calming tablets are generally avoided in pregnancy as they can affect foetal development and if taken in late pregnancy they can cause withdrawal restlessness in newborn. However, if there is a lot of anxiety then certain antidepressants may be considered until 37-38 weeks and withdrawn before delivery and restarted soon after birth.

I suggest you consult your gynaecologist for general check up including BP and consider seeing ENT specialist for nose bleeds. Similarly, psychiatric consultation will be warranted for advise, support and safe prescribing of medicine, if at all necessary.

Our doctors will answer all queries on emotional and mental health. Got mind trouble of your own? Drop us a mail at [bpositiveQA@apollolife.com](mailto:bpositiveQA@apollolife.com)

Or write to

BPositive magazine,  
Lifetime Wellness Rx International Ltd,  
5th Floor, Life Science Building,  
Apollo Health City, Jubilee Hills,  
Hyderabad-500033

**Dr Roshan Jain,**  
Senior Consultant Psychiatrist &  
De-addiction Specialist,  
Apollo Hospitals, Bangalore.