

# PERINATAL ANXIETY

Anxiety symptoms and/or positive screen (GAD-7  $\geq$  10)

## Differential Diagnosis:

- \*Situational stress/Adjustment disorder (anxiety related to stressful life events, intimate partner violence/abuse, pregnancy-related anxiety)
- \*Anxiety secondary to medical condition (e.g. hyperthyroidism)
- \*Anxiety secondary to substance use/withdrawal, medications
- \*Primary anxiety disorder (meets DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, specific phobia)
- \*Anxiety secondary to another psychiatric disorder (if obsessions/compulsions, think of OCD; if trauma history, nightmares/flashbacks, think of PTSD)

**Consider comorbidity:** Depression common; many people with anxiety disorders have more than one

## Mild anxiety:

- \*Address stressors, provide information, problem-solving, increased social support
- \*Relaxation, mindfulness, meditation, yoga
- \*Consider psychotherapy

## Moderate/severe anxiety:

- \*Psychotherapy (especially cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT))
- \*Medication (weigh risks of untreated anxiety vs. risks of medications, alternative treatments)

## Risks of untreated anxiety:

- \*Decreased placental blood flow
- \*Increased stress reactivity, HPA axis activation, cortisol levels
- \*Increased rates of preeclampsia, gestational hypertension, preterm birth, low birth weight, prolonged labor, postpartum hemorrhage
- \*Increased risk of postpartum depression; impaired attachment
- \*Cognitive and motor delays, emotional and behavioral problems in child



## Risks of medications in pregnancy and lactation:

- \*SSRI antidepressants are first-line medication treatment for anxiety disorders
- \*No consistent increase in rates of malformations
- \*Persistent pulmonary hypertension of the newborn (PPHN; 2.9 vs. 1.8/1000)
- \*Neonatal adaptation syndrome in 30%; worse if also taking benzodiazepines
- \*Monitor breastfed infants for sedation/poor feeding
- \*Other medications can be used for adjunctive/as-needed treatment of anxiety (see Perinatal Anxiety Medications table for risks of benzodiazepines and other anxiolytics)

## Alternative treatments:

- \*Psychotherapy (CBT)
- \*Mindfulness, meditation, relaxation
- \*Exercise, yoga

## Goal:

- \*Treat to remission
- \*Track GAD-7 to measure progress/outcome
- \*If not improved, add medication/ psychotherapy to existing treatment, try a second SSRI or an SNRI, and/or seek psychiatric consultation/referral