

CONFESSIONS OF A PREGNANT

HYPOCHONDRIAC

BY SARA BRIDGET AU

I confess. I was a pregnant hypochondriac.

Well...perhaps not clinically, but I'm wired to overreact when it comes to medical issues. Most of the time, I know I'm being silly, but I can't seem to stop.

After the initial joy of seeing those two beautiful lines on the home pregnancy test, I started obsessing about all that could go wrong. Predictably, my hypochondria kicked into high gear. What about those couple of glasses of wine I'd had? Or that time I took cold medicine? Did I even *look* at a vegetable last week?

I knew it was really bad when I convinced myself I'd blinded my baby. I was about five months pregnant and had been very careful about not using any drugstore products that could be passed through the placenta. But that week I had a major outbreak of zits and, without a second thought, I put my usual hydrogen peroxide on them. In the middle of the night, I woke up in a cold sweat and, with shaking hands, dialed my doctor. Through the phone line, I could just about hear his smile as he informed me that hydrogen peroxide is not, in fact, a poison, but is simply water with an oxygen molecule tacked on. I would have known this if I'd been able to calm down and think rationally enough to check the ingredients on the label. A couple weeks later, I inadvertently ate a moldy bagel and knew that this time, I must have done some real damage. My doctor told me I'd just inoculated the baby with a little penicillin — thank goodness he likes a good laugh.

Healthy hypochondria

I'm not the only one with these kinds of real and/or imagined fears, which run the gamut from mundane to serious. But we can all take heart because healthcare providers assure me this is normal — even healthy — behavior. Dr. Nina Cerfolio, who is both an Ob/Gyn and a clinical psychiatrist in New York City, explains, "Women, especially with the first pregnancy, have a lot of concerns about how their body changes, the food they eat, dying their hair, medications they can and can't take, and so on...it's the unknown that is scary." She says these sometimes-crazy feelings mean our maternal instincts are working perfectly.

Mairi Breen Rothman, a nurse-midwife in Takoma Park, Maryland, agrees, putting things in a great perspective: "In the modern world of America, we don't have to worry about large predators eating our babies or the baby freezing to death like our cave-mama ancestors did, but we are hard-wired to be worrying about something. That is part of our job!" ►►