

# Exploring Couvade syndrome: The surprising Symptoms of Sympathetic Pregnancy

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*These men were so attuned to their partners, they started to develop the same symptoms*

– Dr. Arthur Brennan

## Abstract:

This study describes the pivotal developmental phase of pregnancy and impending parenthood, highlighting the distinct experiences encountered by both expectant mothers and fathers. Couvade syndrome, informally termed sympathetic pregnancy, emerges in soon-to-be fathers who display symptoms mirroring those of their pregnant partners. Despite being often trivialized, Couvade syndrome can provoke distress in men, exhibiting symptoms such as gastrointestinal issues, psychological strain, and behavioral modifications. Although not formally acknowledged as a medical condition, its widespread occurrence underscores the necessity for deeper explorations into its causative factors. The term "couvade" originates from the French "couvee," signifying incubation or nurturing, coined by anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in 1865. Across diverse cultures, Couvade syndrome has piqued interest due to its intriguing resemblance to pregnancy symptoms in men. The proposed rationales for this occurrence encompass psychological, physiological, and societal dimensions, encompassing anxiety, hormonal shifts, and gender roles. Several predisposing factors, including socioeconomic status, first-time parenthood, emotional stressors, and cultural background, may heighten susceptibility to Couvade syndrome. Manifestations range from physical discomforts to emotional turmoil and behavioral alterations, reflecting a multifaceted reaction to the imminent fatherhood journey.

While no standardized treatment protocol exists for Couvade syndrome, coping mechanisms such as stress management, regular physical activity, wholesome nutrition, and abstention from substances like alcohol and drugs are recommended. Additionally, alternative modalities such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), yoga, and pharmacotherapy may offer relief from symptoms. Couvade syndrome typically dissipates postpartum as fathers shift their focus to the newborn. Despite its transient nature, further research is imperative to deepen comprehension and extend support to expectant fathers during this distinctive transition to parenthood.

**Keywords:** Couvade Syndrome, Pregnancy, Men

## Introduction

Pregnancy and the transition to parenthood is a major developmental period. The transition to parenthood differs in times and ways between father and mother. Couvade syndrome is a condition in which men begin to experience abnormal symptoms that can mirror the symptoms of their pregnant mate. This may seem like a joke, but it's no laughing matter. It can be very distressing for men to experience pregnancy symptoms while their partner is pregnant. Couvade is almost always temporary and not serious. It may be caused by stress, empathy, or hormonal changes in expecting dads.

### What is Couvade syndrome?

The name couvades come from the French word "couvee," which means "to hatch" or "to brood, incubate". Couvade syndrome, sometimes called sympathetic pregnancy, the expectant mothers partner has symptoms that uncannily mimic pregnancy. Though Couvade syndrome isn't a recognized disease or mental illness, studies suggests that it may be common. More research is needed to learn what's behind it.

## History

Couvade is a term 1<sup>st</sup> coined by anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in 1865 to describe the child expectancy habits that he had observed that men mimicked the pain their partner experienced during labor/breast feeding among primitive communities.

Research has indicated that couvades syndrome is a relatively common phenomenon. However, it is not recognized as an official medical or psychological issue.

## What causes Couvade syndrome?

Several different explanations have been proposed for Couvade syndrome. These include:

### Psychological factors:

- May be caused by a man's anxiety or insecurity about becoming a father.
- They may feel that they are no longer the primary focus of their family or partner's attention.

### Biological factors:

- May be caused by changes in a man's hormone levels during pregnancy. This includes an increase in certain hormones, such as prolactin or a decrease in testosterone.
- Stress is one of the reasons which cause decreased testosterone.

### Social factors:

- Couvades syndrome may be related to a man's social role. For example, if he feels excluded from the experience or feels like he is taking on a traditional female role, he may experience the symptoms of Couvades syndrome.

## What could be the risk factors for Couvades syndrome?

Though the risk factors of the Couvades syndrome are not well known, some factors could increase the risk of Couvades syndrome. They are,

- Lower socioeconomic status
- Becoming to be a father for the first time
- Greater emotional involvement in child birth due to past traumas
- Man belongs to certain ethnic minority groups.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

The present study findings indicated that most of the 1<sup>st</sup> time expectant fathers experienced physical, psychological and behavioral symptoms. It include,

- Physical symptoms: physical symptoms were related to gastrointestinal disturbance such as changes in appetite either increased or decreased or with some man's experiencing alternatively, constipation, flatulence, indigestion, weight gain, swelling of ankles and feet, toothache, nausea, diarrhea and abdominal pain in varying degrees and duration.
- Psychological symptoms: Psychological ones were less common and include insomnia, mood irritability and night mares. Anxiety, Insomnia appeared to be linked to other symptoms such as tiredness and lethargy or pregnancy-related worries and demands.
- Behavioral symptoms: it includes impaired concentration, disturbed sleep, appetite changes, increased smoking and drinking, craving for specific foods, anxiety etc...

## What is the treatment?

There is no standard specific treatment recommended for couvades syndrome because syndrome almost always goes away after the baby is born. This can be managed by following simple measures:

- Engaging in stress-relieving activities
- Exercising regularly

- Getting extra diet
- Eating a balanced diet
- Avoiding alcohol and drugs
- What are the alternative therapies?
- Couvade syndrome will be treated by using psychological interventions, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), to address symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Other therapies like yoga and medications will also help to relieve some symptoms of couvade syndrome.

### **When will Couvade syndrome go away?**

Fortunately, Couvade is almost always temporary and not serious. And while there's no magic pill to get rid of syndrome, symptoms can persist in men until the baby is born.

### **Conclusion**

Couvade syndrome, also called sympathetic pregnancy, or “pregnant dad syndrome,” is a situation, where the father experiences somatic and/ or psychiatric symptoms during his wife s pregnancy. Couvade syndrome is normal for the expectant fathers to experience some discomforts during their wife’s pregnancy and it is not considered an illness.

It is advised that the man try to relax, having a balanced diet, avoid consuming drugs and alcohol, exercise regularly, and engage in stress relief techniques can help to alleviate symptoms.

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