

# Good start to family life

## *mindfulness during pregnancy in at-risk women*

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### **Background**

Every year about 800 pregnant women is associated with the antenatal outpatient clinic at Hvidovre Hospital. The antenatal care is targeted at-risk pregnant women with a history of mental illness, drug abuse or other psychosocial problems, that may have a negative impact on pregnancy and the development of the fetus.

The first year of life is a sensitive period where the infant is vulnerable to the capacity of its parents or primary caregivers to establish a reliable, responsive and supportive environment. Mental illness or other psychosocial problems may interfere with the ability to respond promptly and appropriately to infant's cues, and have a severe impact on the long-term development of the infant.

Mindfulness is taught to increase awareness of – and to provide an alternate mode of relating to experience that is present-focused, decentered, accepting and non-judgemental. The practices used in teaching mindfulness address universal vulnerabilities: those mental or behavioural habits that undermine well-being.

Teaching mindfulness to at-risk pregnant women may strengthen their mental health and ability to establish a strong and healthy relationship with their infant. In addition, mindfulness is a non-pharmacological option with no potential harmful side-effects, and thus may be an especially acceptable intervention during pregnancy.

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### **Projects and techniques**

The overall aim of the project is to develop a mindfulness-based program for at-risk pregnant women that can be delivered by midwives.

The project will include the following steps:

- 1) An 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction program (MBSR) for the staff at the clinic
- 2) MBSR for a group of pregnant women attending the clinic
- 3) Development of a mindfulness-based program for at-risk pregnant women
- 4) Pilot trial testing the effect of the program
- 5) Randomised trial

The effect will be evaluated by means of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

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