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Taking to bed

Recently more experts are moving away from bed rest recommendations—here's why and what to do if your doctor prescribes it. **BY TIFFANY R. JANSEN**

Jessica Hanley was 19 weeks pregnant and feeling great when she went in for a routine ultrasound. “I had no reason to think I would be in the hospital that afternoon and not leave for a week,” recalls the San Diego hairstylist.

The ultrasound showed that her cervix had shortened to “practically nothing” and had begun to funnel. Following an emergency cerclage to stitch her cervix closed, Hanley was put on bed rest.

Rest might not be best

Since the 1800s, bed rest has been recommended to help women with pregnancy complications carry to term. Complications could mean anything from multiple babies or fetal growth problems to vaginal bleeding or signs of preterm labor. In Hanley's case, it was an incompetent cervix.

Each year, roughly 20 percent of mothers are put on bed rest at some point during their pregnancy. Hanley, who was put on strict bed rest, was permitted to shower every other day (“They tried to have me maximize my bathroom/shower

[time] to five minutes,” she says) and leave the house only for doctor's visits. In other cases, a mom may be asked to rest for anywhere from one to eight hours a day while avoiding household chores and heavy lifting.

Interestingly, there is no evidence that bed rest is beneficial in preventing preterm

DID YOU KNOW?

Bed rest isn't always spent in bed. In some cases, it's just a matter of reducing your activity level for a while.

First things first

If your doctor recommends that you go on bed rest, don't hit the sack before you ...

Study up. While there isn't a ton of research on bed rest during pregnancy, the studies that have been done suggest that bed rest doesn't actually prevent preterm birth. Taking a look at the findings and talking to women who have been on bed rest can help you decide if it's right for you.

Know the side effects. Staying in bed all day may sound like a dream come true, but it can come with a number of downsides. Women on bed rest can deliver low birth-weight babies and experience bone and muscle loss, slower postpartum recovery, depression and anxiety, family and financial stress, and preterm delivery.

Talk to your doctor. Why are you being put on bed rest? Will you be hospitalized or at home? Is it complete bed rest or will you be given breaks? Do the benefits outweigh the risks? Are there other options?

Get a second opinion. Ask your doctor if there's a maternal-fetal medicine specialist (high risk pregnancy expert) you can speak with. If you can, get another physician's opinion.

birth. In fact, one 2013 study of women with a short cervix found that women prescribed activity restriction were much more likely to deliver early than those who were not.

While the jury is still out on whether bed rest actually works, evidence shows that it might cause harm. The main concern is blood clots. “Pregnancy increases your risk of having blood clots, and then not moving increases your risk even more,” says Linda Szymanski, medical director of labor and delivery at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.

Other possible complications include depression, bone loss, weight gain and trouble sleeping. “We also worry about

On the wrong side of the bed

Fewer practitioners are recommending bed rest due to lack of evidence of its effectiveness. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) actually cautions against bed rest due to possible negative effects, such as muscle atrophy and increased risk of blood clots.

Sit this one out

Even Beyoncé had to take things down a notch. The singer, while pregnant with twins, stepped down as Coachella's headliner on doctor's orders.



muscle deterioration from just lying around and not being active, which also can be a problem after the baby is born," says Audrey Merriam, an OB/GYN in Delaware who specializes in maternal-fetal medicine.

In addition to medical concerns, bed rest can take a toll on other aspects of life as well. In cases where both parents are working, the loss of income once the mom-to-be goes on bed rest can result in a tremendous amount of pressure. Partners get loaded down with additional responsibilities, which can cause anxiety and stress, and children often don't understand why mommy can't hold them or play.

Alternate route

Neither Merriam nor Szymanski recommend bed rest to their patients, though they may prescribe reduced activity. For instance, "If a woman is a heavy exerciser and has a risk for preterm birth, we might ask that she cut back on the amount of exercise she does," says Merriam.

If your doctor does prescribe bed rest, talk to her about it. Find out what kind of bed rest she's recommending and why. You can also mention the lack of evidence to support bed rest. Share any concerns you may have and discuss possible alternatives. It could be that the perceived benefits of bed rest in your situation outweigh the possible risks. Ultimately, if you're not satisfied with her responses, get a second opinion.

After 17 weeks on bed rest and an additional four weeks following her cerclage removal, Hanley gave birth to a healthy baby boy. Two years later, she and her husband have decided to add a second little one to their family. "That's another long, hard thing to think about," she confesses. "It took a while for me to actually go, 'OK, I think I'm ready now.'" She hopes that, "by some miracle," this time she won't have to go on bed rest.

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HOW TO COPE WHEN YOU'RE STUCK IN BED

When Tamar Roig was put on bed rest at 11 weeks due to a placental abruption, she was thrilled. "I really needed the rest, and being at home and able to relax and sleep and watch TV was great," she says. But after two weeks, she'd had enough. Here are some tips to avoid going stir-crazy.

KEEP BUSY. Dive into your to-read pile, go through your Netflix queue, or work on those DIY projects you've been putting off. Do some crafting, reach for an adult coloring book, or take a free online course. Think of this as your chance to do everything you've always wanted to do but never had the time.

BE SOCIAL. You're on bed rest; you're not a hermit. Tune in to the outside world by phone, social media or video chat. Better yet, invite friends and family over for an in-person visit.

STAY CONNECTED. Bed rest is a difficult time for the whole family. Checking in with your partner once a week for a 'date night' or doing light activities like reading or puzzles with your child will make you feel closer to each other and help keep family stress in check.

THINK POSITIVE. When you're spending most of your day in bed, often alone, it's easy to let negative thoughts creep in and take over. Instead,

focus on the positive and visualize things continuing to go well. "I tell my clients to picture the ideal scenario of the day of the birth and coming home from the hospital," says Jessica Fisher, a California-based bed rest life coach. "Visualize every single detail. How is that going to go? What does the baby look like?"

MOVE IT. Inactivity can lead to bone and muscle weakness, not to mention high blood pressure and increased risk of blood clots. Moms on bed rest also have a harder time bouncing back after delivery. Talk to your doctor about easy stretches and exercises you can do during bed rest, or consider enlisting the help of a physical therapist.

GET READY. You may not be able to decorate the nursery or hit the stores for baby items, but there are plenty of ways to prepare for the new arrival from your bed. Fisher, who spent months on bed rest during her first pregnancy, read parenting

books and researched parenting methods that appealed to her. It's also a great time to study up on the best baby products and brands for your registry.

CELEBRATE. Throw yourself a baby shower at home or in the hospital. Go all out with the gender reveal, and go ahead and book that photographer for an in-bed pregnancy photo shoot. Things may not have gone the way you planned, but this is still a special time and well worth celebrating. Make the most of it in whatever way you can.

REACH OUT. Join a Facebook group for moms on bed rest or chat with other moms on forums like Sidelines.org and KeepEmCookin.com. Roig found video blogs by moms on bed rest particularly helpful during her pregnancy. And be sure to ask for help when things get tough. Your doctor, friends and family are there to help you in whatever way they can. Life coaching and therapy can also lend support.

