PSA: 10 Things Not To Say To A Pregnant Woman

By Ana-Marija Dolaskie — August 7, 2017

Here I am, 30 weeks into my pregnancy and feeling mighty darn good about my bump. After all, just last week a stranger — who also happens to be an OB — had validated my confidence by guessing exactly how far along I was just by looking at me. Well, thanks lady! It made my day that she thought I looked exactly like what I needed to look like at 29 weeks along.

And then there are the brave ones: the ones who don't think before they speak; the ones who may or may not think they're being funny; and the ones who really are oblivious as to what a woman's body goes through during pregnancy. Let's face it: so many things are shaping and re-shaping on a woman's body during pregnancy, and the last thing she needs is for someone to crack a joke about her weight and appearance. And let's be clear: I couldn't care less about comments made in jest, nor do I get insulted when someone says something inappropriate. But I am quite appalled when people (both male and female) say something that could be construed as hurtful, without thinking. What's more fascinating to me is the psychology behind why people speak before they think. Here are just a few gems I've personally heard over the last few months:

1. Your due date is when? Are you sure?

This one I could give the benefit of doubt: did you mean that as a compliment? Like, Wow, you look great, are you sure you're that far along? But given that the dude had major side-eye I would think that wasn't his intention. Yes, I'm sure. Welcome to the 21st century where we have ultrasounds and measurements. Typically, after your first couple appointments, your OB will know exactly when your due date is, give or take a couple days. It's hardly a guessing game anymore, pal, but thank you for your concern about me potentially going into labor in front of you.
2. You're starting to waddle a little there!

First, a little lesson on waddling: During the last trimester, it's normal to feel a bit like a penguin, so I've learned. The pregnancy waddle isn't a myth, and here's a recent study [1] that shows support. Pregnant women tend to lean backwards more and bend their knees less while walking. Back and joint pains can also affect the way we walk. These combinations can cause us to lose stability. Hence, penguins.

So thanks, lady working at the deli department. Maybe she was pissed that I haven't bought turkey and ham deli cuts from her in seven months? Yes, that's it! Pregnant woman are urged to stay away from deli meats as they carry a higher risk of listeria which, unlike salmonella, can break through the placental barrier and harm the fetus. Listeriosis during pregnancy increases the risk of miscarriage, premature delivery, and/or infection to the newborn. You can read more on that here. [2]

3. Whoa, you're getting HUUUGE!

Well, yes, that's kind of what happens when you're growing a human inside you. In fact, I did a video about this not too long ago in, The Pregnancy Diaries: Where Does All The Weight Go? [3], where I detail how the weight gets distributed. Hint: Half of it is in the growing placenta, so it has very little to do with our late-night trips to the fridge.

Note: This comment was definitely a joke, but it's a good reminder that some women may not find it funny — at all. And since I don't believe I am YUUUGE, I can even fake laugh at it. But really, it's neither original nor funny, so just don't.

4. With all of mine, I think I only gained like 20 pounds!

Well that's nice and I am genuinely happy for you. But I'm on track to hit 30 'cuz I like a good challenge. Also, see my comments above.

5. And you're sure it isn't twins?

Yes, I'm sure. In fact, I'm 100% positive since, very early on, we were told I may have experienced something called a vanishing twin syndrome. [4] This happens when a twin disappears in the uterus as a result of miscarriage, and it is not uncommon. But I'm also sure because we have now have ultrasounds. It's kind of hard to sneak another heartbeat in there this late in the pregnancy.

6. You look like you're ready to pop!

Yes... I am ready... to pop you in the mouth.

7. I think it's a boy/girl because __________ (you're carrying high/low/wide/narrow/sideways/upside down/OK! I'm Kidding)

Old wives tales do not have any scientific evidence to back them up, but they can be fun if you're trying to guess whether someone is having a boy or a girl. According to myths, boys tend to be carried low and narrow, and girls high and wide. And that's typically right — 50 percent of the time.

Truth is, carrying high or low has very little to do with the gender of your fetus, and a lot to do with your abdominal muscles and body type. Women who carry high typically have stronger abdominal
muscles, while women who carry low do not. Multiple pregnancies cause women to carry lower than the first, too. A short torso with less room for uterus to grow upward will cause it to get wider. A tall woman with a long torso has more room between the pelvis and rib cage, so the uterus stays narrow.

8. Are you sure it’s not a girl? Because from behind, you look like you have spread!

Baby got back. Also, see my comments on carrying 'wide' above.

9. Oh that's OK, the next one could be a girl!

Why do you assume I want a girl? (I mean, I do).

10. Better sleep as much as you can now before the baby comes!

What the hell does that even mean? Can one bank sleep for later use? Can I pop it over to my savings account? Can I use it as a lifeline when euphoria and anxiety are in full swing? Many will advise to "sleep when the baby sleeps," which is a good advice in theory, but rarely works in real life. We've written about sleep deprivation and health before, but there's not much to be done when you first bring baby home. Eventually, you and your partner will be back on track, but there isn't a magic button that shoots a burst of energy into your system on command.

The closest thing is caffeine.

I'd like to conclude by listing all the things you should say to a pregnant woman:

You look fantastic.

Or, as the age-old saying goes, If you don't have anything nice to say... Just lie to me.

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