



Overcoming Unexpected Challenges

By Emma Sutherland

When I looked at the pregnancy test and saw a double blue line my heart literally stopped beating and I felt instantly transported out of my body by adrenaline. This was not what I had expected and my mind raced at the thousands of pieces of information that were instantly flooding my brain. I mean, I always wanted a child but right now I had a TV show coming out, a 2011 Goal Sheet that was worthy of Amelia Erhardt and Steve Jobs combined and had barely known the father for more than four months.

So what does any sensible woman do - another five pregnancy tests, followed up by three blood tests just in case that pregnancy hormone belonged to someone else. No, it belonged to me, and the realisation that I was going to be a mum for the first time started to trickle into my consciousness.

When an event occurs that is so far from your realm of possibility, your whole meaning of life shifts, it is like the ground underneath you is no longer solid. Time stands still, and emotions flood every single cell of your body until they feel like exploding. I felt completely overwhelmed and extremely anxious about how

I would manage. I always had a vision that I would be living with my soul partner and we would complete all the wonderful, naturopathic pre-conception health care that I help my clients with. The result would be an easy conception, joyous pregnancy, spiritual birth, a healthy baby and bonded family.

I had an easy conception but the possibilities for pregnancy, birth and beyond plagued me with anxiety and stress. At eight weeks I had an umbilical hernia issue that landed me in emergency and the subsequent seven weeks of non-stop pain were awful. Continual pain erodes your threshold for coping and I soon became fragile and vulnerable to everything around me.

The challenges I faced were the biggest of my life. I had experienced many challenges in my life so far. My mum left us when I was eight and my dad worked three jobs to provide for us. My long-term partner of ten years had serious health problems that involved open-heart surgery and his rehabilitation was long and slow and as a result I lost the man I fell in love with. I overcame severe hepatitis and discovered my own journey back to optimal health.

This challenge was bigger than any of those, as having a child

changes your life forever - it is not a phase to get through. I felt under-resourced in every way, emotionally, mentally, physically, spiritually and financially. My expectations of a rosy picket fence life with a soul partner were no longer a possibility.

I thought about what I usually do when faced with challenges and realised that my practical, logical and organised approach was needed but I could not seem to access it. It was hiding behind a wall of fear and anxiety that left me incapable of making any decision. I suffered from deep anxiety in 2009 and I sunk back into that space. Pain, feeling overwhelmed and not having enough support around me were the triggers.

As a naturopath who specialises in women's health, this type of situation is not foreign to me and I have supported women through such difficult times. It began to frustrate me that I could not seem to help myself, why I could not shift the emotions and shift the situation into a better one. I have done so much personal development over the years and even with all my skills I was paralysed and unable to put them into action.

The tipping point was a conversation with my dad. My dad and I have always been extremely close and he is the rock in my life. He gently reminded me of how much I had achieved in my life, how far I had come, of the incredible love and warmth I hold for others and how every step is taken for a reason. Acceptance was the first step for me. I needed to accept that my circumstances were okay, despite not being what I had always envisioned.

I felt a little tension leave my body as I thought about a future with my child. I did have resources such as a very supportive family and strong friendships that I could lean on. My natural tendency is to be fiercely independent but there is a certain grace in allowing others to help you, as it gives them an opportunity to show their love. The connection with my baby strengthened as a result of this acceptance and that in turn started to fill me with a sense of joy. My next step was to talk to people I knew were experienced and could share their wisdom with me. I asked as many questions that I could of my grandma, my business mentor and then leaders in the field of parenting psychology and took their words of wisdom and advice into my heart. To that I added my own naturopathic knowledge and then I made a plan.

My top priority was to look after myself physically and go back to my basics. I began making big pots of beautiful organic soups and casseroles and nourished myself with nutritionally dense food. Anxiety typically makes me lose my appetite and drop weight and I did not want to continue doing either of these. There is something so deeply nurturing about taking the time and effort to pick out fresh produce. Then put on some nice music and make a cup of herbal tea while you are cooking, as it soothes the soul and feeds your sense of self-love.

To calm my anxiety I once again turned to the power of Naturopathic medicine. The following therapeutic foods and medicinal herbs are perfect to ease anxiety and promote a sense of wellbeing.

Therapeutic Foods

Omega 3 Essential Fatty Acids

Omega 3's literally wrap themselves around frayed nerves like a warm blanket and the research is clear about the incredible benefits of these nutritious compounds for anxiety and depression. You can find them in hemp seed oil, oily fish such as sardines, salmon and mackerel, nuts, seeds, avocados and flax seed oil.

Protein

Having a regular intake of high quality protein stabilises your sugar levels. This leaves you less likely to experience the highs and lows of blood glucose that lead you to emotionally eat, feel short tempered and irritable. Protein is found in lean meats (preferably organic), eggs, nuts, seeds, legumes and pulses - aim for four to five palm sized portions daily.

Antioxidants

Foods that are high in antioxidants contain powerful healing compounds that prevent damage occurring to our cells and organs. This improves energy levels and promotes longevity. My top six antioxidant, rich foods are Inca berries, pomegranates, broccoli, wild caught salmon, garlic and turmeric. Other foods high in antioxidants include berries, grapes, kiwifruit, walnuts, pepitas, chia seeds, quinoa and amaranth.

Superfoods

These are foods that have extraordinary levels of certain vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Apart from brimming with goodness they are also a lot of fun! My favourites are:

- Raw cacao - thank the Lord, the origin of chocolate is full of antioxidants but also the relaxing mineral magnesium
- Acai berries - bursting with vitamin C and a natural anti inflammatory
- Chlorophyll - gently reduces the acidity or pH associated with stress and anxiety
- Maca - high in protein and supports optimal hormonal health
- Bee pollen - strengthens the immune system which is often compromised when you are anxious

Medicinal Herbs to Promote a Sense of Calm

I have listed my top three below but speak to a Naturopath, as there are many more beautiful herbs that can help you.

Zizyphus Spinosa

This Chinese herb is particularly effective for people who suffer insomnia as a result of their stress and anxiety. Zizyphus is a very mild sedative and the perfect herb for those who are irritable and feeling overwhelmed as a result of their emotional stress. I took a lot of this herb when I found out I was pregnant.

Passiflora Incarnata

I have used Passionflower extensively for anxious children and find that it soothes and calms the most active mind. Besides that, I simply love the name. I prefer to prescribe it as a herbal tisane - mix two teaspoons of the dried herb with 150ml hot water, allow to steep for five minutes and then sip. You can add Manuka honey for kids or a chamomile tea bag to improve your sleep quality.

Lavandula Officinalis

Lavender has been used for thousands of years to ease anxiety, mild depression, headaches and colic. Try adding a few drops of lavender essential oil into the corner of your shower, then turn the hot water on and inhale deeply. Or pop a few drops on a tissue and leave under your pillow at night.

I now feel a sense of calm about my situation despite the fact it has not really changed. I realise that I need to remain grounded in every way, not just physically. If I nurture my body and soul with beautiful therapeutic foods and take some soothing medicinal herbs, then I can make the decisions I need to. The internal shift has been dynamic, despite the external environment remaining static. I believe that any challenge can be overcome if you have the right information, tools and people around you and sometimes we also need to go on a journey within to find the resources we need. ❖

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