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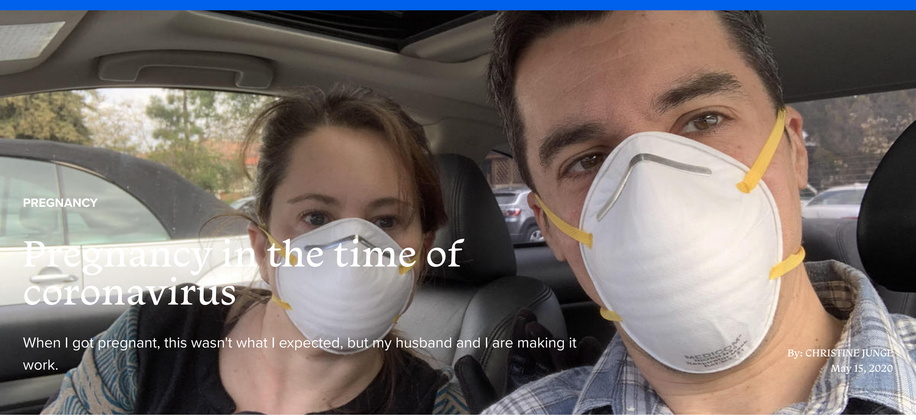

PREGNANCY

Pregnancy in the time of coronavirus

When I got pregnant, this wasn't what I expected, but my husband and I are making it work.

By: CHRISTINE JUNGE
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I got pregnant just before we started to learn that the coronavirus had spread to the United States. Had I known it was going to come to California, where I live, with such a vengeance, I probably would have put off trying. Though so far it seems pregnant women and their babies are recovering from the virus as well as anybody, the thought of getting sick with anything when you're carrying is stressful. Add to that the unknowns of this novel, highly contagious virus, and it's hard not to worry all the time. So waiting would have been a good idea. But here I am. Ten weeks pregnant in these strange and uncertain times.

Not surprisingly, things have changed fast and nothing is how I expected. We've been sheltering in place for weeks, only leaving the house for medical appointments and food. When my husband and I arrived at our doctor's office for an early ultrasound two weeks ago, we put on masks and gloves before we got out of the car. We were stopped at the door, where, from six feet away, a check-in person asked if we had a fever or cough or if we had traveled out of the United States recently. Once inside, I paced around the waiting room. I snapped at my husband when he told me to calm down. I read over the fine print on a poster just to keep myself occupied.

I am prone to existential angst, but now feels appropriate to ask the question: What kind of world am I bringing a child into?

Under normal circumstances I probably would have been tingly with nervous excitement. Now? Let's just say the crying I did when I saw the baby's heartbeat for the first time was half out of sheer joy and half out of sheer terror.

This is my first pregnancy, but I imagine that pregnancy is probably a good mix of joy and terror in normal times. Now, everyone's terrified all the time, and as an already anxious person, I'm no exception. I worry about getting sick. I worry about what that would mean for the baby. I worry about how we will fare financially after this is all over. I worry about when this will ever be over. I worry about what the world will look like afterward. I am prone to existential angst, but now feels appropriate to ask the question: What kind of world am I bringing a child into?

I try to keep in mind that every generation asks themselves this; every generation has its crisis. My parents had the Cold War. Their parents had World War II. And their parents had the Great Depression. I assumed my generation would have just the dynamic duo of terrorism and global warming—but now add a deadly global pandemic to the mix. I'm hoping at the end of this that it will just be another crisis we will have gotten through. I have faith in the scientists working on vaccines and treatments. I have faith in many of our international leaders contemplating the future with a smart balance of public health concerns and economic concerns. But I fear that global pandemics will be a new normal, that this is the cost we pay for wreaking havoc on the planet. Maybe quarantines will be something my child thinks is normal, like today's children think of active shooter drills.

But for now, I'm focused on getting through the pregnancy and adapting however we need to. Practically speaking, being pregnant during a global pandemic has some pluses and minuses.

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On the downside, it's hard to go through pregnancy cravings when I can't simply go to the store to pick up the latest odd thing my body is demanding (currently, it's the stereotypical pickles, which we're out of). It's also not a good time to be peeing constantly, what with the run on toilet paper and all.

When we got our first shelter-in-place order in mid-March, I was terrified we'd run out of food. But so far stores are still stocked, if lacking certain items like cleaning supplies, flour, and the aforementioned toilet paper. I'm trying to be thankful that, although I don't have everything I demand at my fingertips, this is the first time in my life that this is happening. I'm grateful for the fact that I've lived a life of immense luxury—even if I really do wish I could run out to get some chocolate chip cookies.

On the positive side, working from home during the pandemic means I'm only ever a few feet away from my private bathroom. I don't know how I would be able to do my hour-long commute followed by eight hours of office work with the terrible morning sickness I'm experiencing. And since I am at my sickest between 6 and 9 a.m., I am generally good to go—if a little queasy—by the time I'm expected in any video meetings. I can also work in stretch pants and nap during my lunch break. These little things are game changers for getting through the workday right now.

My doctor's office has been amazing, too, answering all my questions, COVID-19-related and otherwise, with great patience. About half my visits will be virtual check-ins until this passes, and I'll only go in for blood work or other tests. So far, they have had no problem letting me bring my husband with me, though I have heard that this is not true at other clinics in my area.

Yesterday I took a walk around the neighborhood for the first time in about a week. Before this, I had been sticking to my backyard. I decided that as long as I crossed the street before I encountered anyone, the tiny risk was worth the psychological benefit, and the walk did help.

Though I try to appreciate the little things, the worry is still always there, underlying everything. But despite this, I have to say that I'm really proud of how my husband and I are handling this challenge. We're keeping to healthy schedules of sleeping and waking at approximately the same times. I've been walking and doing prenatal yoga videos on YouTube. My husband has been grocery shopping (so I don't have to risk being exposed), waiting on me, and making me food when I'm too sick to do so myself. We're doing a lot of crafts (currently I'm making pillows out of old T-shirts), baking (eating homemade banana muffins as I write), and watching a whole lot of television.

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And we're using this time to imagine life with our little one—we have an extensive board on Pinterest of nursery ideas, and I ordered a pregnancy journal to record this amazing, awful time. We haven't talked much about the existential questions, since there are no answers and the questions are frankly upsetting. We're also trying not to dwell on the disappointments—the canceled trips or the fact that this means we won't get to see our families, who are on the East Coast, while I'm pregnant. Instead, we are trying to focus on what we can control: the books we'll read to the baby, how we'll manage our parental leaves, and how to keep me from panicking at our next appointment.

I'm hoping our ability to work together and remain positive, despite the circumstances, bodes well for the next ridiculously stressful task we'll tackle: parenthood.

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About the author

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