



DENTAL PAIN OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN IN EXPECTANT FATHERS – COUVADE SYNDROME: AN UPDATE FOR DENTAL PRACTITIONERS

Dentistry

Anish N*

Chief Dental Surgeon And Specialist Oral Diagnostician, Smile 4 U Dental Care, Malappuram, Kerala*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Couvade Syndrome or Sympathetic pregnancy is a condition in which the expectant father share the same physical and psychological symptoms of their pregnant partner. They may present with varied symptoms like weight gain, tooth pain, constipation, insomnia, mood swings, abdominal pain, etc. Of great importance to the dentist is a patient coming with tooth pain, in which even after a thorough examination, no source for the same can be ascertained. In such cases, before considering intentional endodontic management, a thorough medical and family history should be obtained, the possibility of Couvade Syndrome should be considered and should be referred to an appropriate specialist.

KEYWORDS

Couvade Syndrome, Sympathetic Pregnancy, Expectant Father, Dental Pain

INTRODUCTION:

Sympathetic Pregnancy or Couvade Syndrome is a condition characterised by physical and psychological symptoms, similar to those of their pregnant partners, experienced by expectant fathers.^{1,2} The condition usually occurs in prospective fathers if their partners are in the first or third trimester.³ The term Couvade was first coined in 1865 from a French word by Edward Burnett Tylor.^{4,5} Being deeply emotional about their partners condition, men appear to share their symptoms.⁶ This deep bond between partners, both emotional and psychological are emphasized in this syndrome.²

Aetiology & Epidemiology:

Couvade Syndrome has reported to have a varies prevalence rate in various countries.⁷ The reported incidence in United Kingdom is between 11 – 50%, United States of America: 25 – 52%, Sweden: 20%, Thailand: 61%, China: 68% and Russia: 35%.⁷ Multiple theories have been proposed as the causative factor for the condition.⁸ One theory states that, the resurgence of ambivalence and oedipal complex occurs in expectant male partner due to pregnancy acting as a catalyst for the same.⁸ As proposed by psycho analytical theories, woman's procreative ability causes an increase of man's envy causing the condition.⁸ An expectant fathers rivalry between the unborn child have also been proposed.⁸ Syndrome has also been linked to anxiety by various studies.⁹ A hormonal basis has been proposed, based on the lower amount of cortisol and testosterone along with increased levels of oestrogen and prolactin associated with the condition.⁸ A complex interaction between hormonal, psychological and sociocultural factors has been linked to the occurrence of sympathetic pregnancy.²

Clinical Features:

The condition can present with a wide variety of symptoms.¹ The symptoms may be mentioned under three headings, namely Physical, Psychological and Behavioural.⁴

A)Physical Symptoms

Increased or decreased appetite, Constipation, Indigestion, Flatulence, Weight gain, Indigestion, dental pain, nausea, diarrhoea and abdominal pain that mimics labour pain.^{2,4}

B)Psychological Symptoms

Insomnia, Night mares, Anxiety, Tiredness, Mood swings.^{2,4}

C)Behavioural Symptoms

Difficulties in concentrating, Increase in the rate of drinking and smoking, Food craving, Sleep disturbances, etc⁴

Dental Manifestations:

The occurrence of unexplained tooth ache in couvade syndrome is of interest due to the fact that this is one of the most common symptom.⁵ When compared with matched controls, more cases of dental pain has been reported.³ The accurate reason for this has not yet been found.³ It is proposed that, this may be linked to the popular belief of late twentieth century that pregnancy will damage a woman's tooth.⁵ Literatures mentioning about the link is very minimal.⁵

Management:

No specific treatment protocols is available for the condition.⁴ The

syndrome mostly resolves on its own after the birth of the child.⁴ However the symptoms may be managed by certain activities like regular exercise, Proper balanced diet, Avoidance of alcohol, etc⁴ In addition to the above, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy has been advised to control symptom's like anxiety and depression.⁴ Regular meditation and yoga has also been found to decrease the symptoms of the condition.⁴

CONCLUSION:

Even though the exact reason is still not understood, the expectant father may sometimes experience the same symptoms of their partners during pregnancy.^{2,4} If the condition occurs, usually they are advised to avoid having alcohol, to have a proper balanced diet, to exercise regularly and to perform certain stress relieving techniques.⁴ It is of great importance to a dentist to be well aware of Couvade Syndrome. The patient may present with unexplained tooth pain,⁵ which should be thoroughly evaluated and a proper medical and family history should be obtained. If any suspicion of couvade syndrome is suspected, the patient must be referred to appropriate specialist.

REFERENCES:

1. Wdowiak K, Maciocha A, Waz J. Couvade Syndrome: History and Current Perspectives. *Journal of Psychosexual Health* 2025;1-5 DOI:10.1177/26318318251343403
2. Mareguddi J. Couvade Syndrome: An Overview. *Saudi Journal of Nursing and Health Care* 2023;6(11):447-8
3. Kucukkaya B, Isik HK. The relationship between the incidence of couvade syndrome and prenatal paternal attachment in prospective fathers and affecting factors. *BMC Public Health* 2025;25:2424
4. Shilpa J. Exploring Couvade Syndrome: The surprising symptoms of sympathetic pregnancy. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 2024;6(2): 1-3
5. Steel B. Couvade Syndrome and toothache. *British Dental Journal* 2017; 223(6): 389
6. Kielbratowska B et al. Couvade syndrome perceived by medical staff and partners of expectant fathers. *GinPolMedProject* 2015;3(37):42-8
7. Brennan, A., Ayers, S., Ahmed, H. & Marshall-Lucette, S. (2007). A critical review of the Couvade syndrome: The pregnant male. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 25(3), pp. 173-189. doi: 10.1080/02646830701467207
8. Brennan, A., Marshall-Lucette, S., Ayers, S. & Ahmed, H. (2007). A qualitative exploration of the couvade syndrome in expectant fathers. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 25(1), 18-39. doi: 10.1080/02646830601117142