

## **This baffling syndrome makes fathers feel pregnant**

Sandy Ong



Getty Images

**Couvade syndrome is experienced by almost half of all partners. It is changing how scientists think about how non-pregnant parents-to-be are affected by their partner's pregnancies.**

1 The symptoms can appear suddenly. Nausea, severe fatigue, numb arms,  
2 tender skin across their arms and chest or a general sense of discomfort or  
3 not feeling like themselves. It's a list that many who have been through  
4 pregnancy might recognize. Except these symptoms are being  
5 experienced by fathers-to-be and non-pregnant partners during the  
6 pregnancy period. The culprit: a little-known condition called Couvade  
7 syndrome.

8 "The best way to describe it is sympathetic pregnancy," says Catherine  
9 Caponero, an obstetrician-gynaecologist at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio,  
10 US, who has seen a few cases. "Essentially, it's when a non-pregnant  
11 partner experiences pregnancy symptoms despite the fact that they're not  
12 biologically pregnant."

13 A growing body of research suggests that the syndrome is more  
14 widespread than previously thought – and some scientists wonder whether  
15 its bizarre symptoms warrant rethinking how bearing a child affects both  
16 parents.

## 17 **Pervasive but unclassified**

18 Couvade can affect dads-to-be, same-sex partners and even  
19 grandmothers-to-be who live with the pregnant person and are closely  
20 involved in their care, says Caponero. Symptoms run the gamut from  
21 nausea to fatigue, backaches to dental pains, mood swings to food  
22 cravings as well as weight gain. Their onset mimics that of a physical  
23 pregnancy and typically peaks during the first and third trimesters before  
24 disappearing post-partum.

25 (...) Today, much about this poorly-studied syndrome remains a mystery.  
26 "Its mechanism is not well-understood," says Daniel Singley,  
27 psychologist and director of the Center for Men's Excellence in San  
28 Diego, in the US. (...) Most researchers agree that Couvade syndrome is  
29 "multifactorial", involving both biological and psychological  
30 components, says Levant.

## 31 **'Brooding' men**

32 The word Couvade derives from the French verb *couver*, which means  
33 ----- . An English anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor, first  
34 popularised the term in 1865, when he used it to describe what he felt was  
35 a peculiar sight he witnessed while travelling through the Basque  
36 countryside: peasant men lying in bed with their newborn infants. (...)   
37 But Couvade can actually be traced as far back as 50BC, when expectant  
38 fathers in Corsica, Cyprus and Iberia would lie in bed and express labour  
39 pains or mime aspects of childbirth, sometimes while wearing their  
40 partner's clothing. Anthropologists would later describe seeing similar  
41 rituals being practised throughout the world by groups in the West Indies,  
42 South America and East Asia. (...)

## 43 **Complex emotions**

44 Today, most experts agree that there's a psychological aspect to Couvade  
45 and that the symptoms likely arise because of the stresses a partner  
46 experiences as a soon-to-be new parent, even if they're not childbearing  
47 themselves. "Having a baby is one of the most significant development  
48 milestones in adult life," says clinical psychologist Kevin Gruenberg,  
49 founder of the California nonprofit Love, Dad. "That can feel very  
50 stressful and overwhelming sometimes, so Couvade could be a way of  
51 reflecting this major transformation that's happening." (...)

## 52 **Showing support**

53 Some experts suggest that expectant fathers involuntarily experience  
54 pregnancy-like symptoms as a deep-rooted, subconscious form of  
55 empathy for their pregnant partners. It's a reflection of "the deep  
56 emotional involvement and identification with the pregnant partner", says  
57 Levant. (...) Powis, for one, compares it to how people historically  
58 performed Couvade rituals. "My definition of Couvade is when anyone  
59 does anything during pregnancy or postpartum to contribute to the support  
60 of pregnant people," says Powis. "When we call it a syndrome, we  
61 pathologise it. But there's nothing wrong with it or particularly unique in  
62 it. It's just human empathy.

## 63 **Shifting hormones**

64 Still, evidence also suggests that Couvade could have a biological  
65 underpinning that spurs the psychological and intentional factors that  
66 follow. (...)

67 Hormonal shifts may account for some Couvade symptoms, says  
68 Edelman. Lower levels of both testosterone and oestradiol, for instance,  
69 are associated with weight gain in men, while the latter has  
70 been linked to depression. What triggers these changes in the first place,  
71 however, remains unknown. (...)

72 Given all the elements at play, Singley rejects the common notion that  
73 Couvade is simply a mirroring, whether conscious or subconscious, of the  
74 pregnant partner's symptoms. "It's a pretty old-school way of looking at  
75 the parenting experience," says Singley. The partner, he says, "is going  
76 through a variety of different psychological, social, neuro, endocrine and  
77 interpersonal adjustments as well, because he's his own person".

78 For expectant fathers, it may be harder to accept, though, given the  
79 societal expectations of how men should behave. "Guys may think: 'I'm a  
80 dude, I can't be depressed – no, that's weak. I'm a dad – I have to be on  
81 point and provide for my family'," says Singley. Instead, he argues, we  
82 should make it okay for them to say, "I can have migraine, I can have  
83 muscle tension, I can have gastrointestinal issues. I can feel like there's  
84 this weight on me."

*<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20260313-the-mysteries-of-couvade-syndrome>*

## **QUESTÕES**

**- Segundo o artigo, a síndrome de Couvade**

- a) ocorre em quase a metade dos parceiros.
- b) é exclusiva das mulheres durante a gestação.
- c) aparece devido a alterações hormonais femininas.
- d) está relacionada ao sistema reprodutor.
- e) depende especialmente da genética familiar.

**- Sobre os sintomas da síndrome de Couvade, qual alternativa NÃO está de acordo com o texto?**

- a) Podem afetar outros filhos.
- b) Podem incluir náusea e fadiga.
- c) Podem envolver mudanças de humor.
- d) Podem surgir de forma repentina.
- e) Podem desaparecer após o parto.

**- A expressão “sympathetic pregnancy” pode ser entendida como**

- a) uma gravidez em que outra pessoa tem sintomas parecidos.
- b) uma gravidez com complicações médicas graves.
- c) uma gestação múltipla envolvendo mais de um feto.
- d) uma gravidez com forte influência genética.
- e) uma condição exclusiva de casais do mesmo sexo.

**- Abaixo há afirmações verdadeiras (V) e falsas (F). Assinale a alternativa correta, conforme o que foi lido.**

**I- A síndrome pode afetar diferentes tipos de parceiros, incluindo avós.**

**II- Os sintomas desaparecem antes do nascimento do bebê.**

**III- A síndrome é totalmente compreendida pela ciência.**

**IV- Os sintomas podem incluir ganho de peso e dores.**

**a) V – F – F - V**

b) V – V – F - F

c) F – V – V - F

d) F – F – V - V

e) V – F – V - F

**- Na linha 33 o que completa o pontilhado é**

**a) to brood or hatch.**

b) to care for or protect.

c) to teach or guide.

d) to build or create.

e) to feel or perceive.

**- De acordo com especialistas, a causa da síndrome está relacionada principalmente**

**a) ao estresse e às mudanças associadas à chegada de um filho.**

b) a doenças psicológicas ou neurológicas graves.

c) à influência direta de medicamentos como hormônios.

d) a fatores principalmente genéticos dos homens.

e) à falta de interação social ou afetiva entre os parceiros.

**- Sobre os registros históricos da Couvade, quais afirmações estão corretas?**

**I- Há relatos desde a Antiguidade.**

**II- Os homens imitavam dores de parto em algumas culturas.**

**III- O fenômeno surgiu apenas na Europa moderna.**

**IV- Práticas semelhantes foram observadas em diferentes regiões do mundo.**

**a) I, II e IV.**

b) I e III.

c) II e III.

d) I, II e III.

e) II, III e IV.

**- De acordo com a leitura, as alterações hormonais podem**

**a) contribuir para sintomas como ganho de peso e depressão.**

b) eliminar parcialmente os sintomas da síndrome.

c) impedir qualquer mudança emocional nos parceiros.

d) ocorrer apenas em mulheres grávidas.

e) ser totalmente compreendidas pelos cientistas.

**- Segundo o que foi lido, a visão atual sobre a síndrome de Couvade sugere que ela**

**a) envolve múltiplos fatores e reflete mudanças complexas no parceiro.**

b) é apenas uma imitação consciente dos sintomas da gestante.

c) deve ser considerada uma alteração grave e rara.

d) ocorre primordialmente por influências sociais e culturais.

e) não possui qualquer relação com emoções humanas.

**- A conclusão do artigo critica**

- a) a visão sobre o papel masculino.
- b) as grandes limitações da ciência.
- c) a incompreensão do mal-estar social.
- d) a luta contra a depressão pós-parto.
- e) o comportamento médico atual.