

## **Medication Guide: Major Depressive Disorder and Social Anxiety in Pregnancy**

**Patient Profile:** 26-year-old woman in her third trimester of pregnancy diagnosed with major depressive disorder and social anxiety disorder

### **1. Medication Choice and Reasoning**

The medication recommended is from the Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI) class, specifically sertraline, also known by the brand name Zoloft. This medication is commonly used to treat both depression and anxiety. Among SSRIs, sertraline is generally considered one of the safest options during pregnancy, especially in the third trimester. Managing depression and anxiety is crucial for both the patient's health and the baby's development, and using medication when necessary can prevent complications related to untreated mental illness.

### **2. Starting Dose and Frequency**

The usual starting dose is 25 milligrams taken once per day, preferably in the morning. This lower dose helps reduce the risk of side effects. After about a week, if the medication is well tolerated, the dose can be increased to 50 milligrams per day. It should be taken consistently each day at the same time.

### **3. How the Medication Works**

Sertraline works by increasing the availability of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a chemical that helps regulate mood, emotions, and anxiety. People with depression or anxiety may have lower serotonin levels. This medication helps balance those levels, which can improve mood, reduce anxious feelings, and support overall emotional stability.

### **4. Duration of Treatment**

Patients typically begin to feel better within four to six weeks of starting the medication, although some may notice improvements sooner. It is generally recommended to continue the medication throughout pregnancy and after delivery unless a healthcare provider advises otherwise. Abruptly stopping the medication can lead to withdrawal symptoms, so any changes should be discussed first.

### **5. Common Side Effects**

Some mild side effects are common when starting sertraline. These may include nausea, tiredness, dry mouth, difficulty sleeping, vivid dreams, dizziness, increased sweating, or mild stomach discomfort. These side effects often go away as the body adjusts to the medication.

### **6. When to Seek Immediate Medical Help**

The patient should contact their healthcare provider right away if they experience any serious symptoms. These may include worsening depression, thoughts of self-harm, severe allergic reactions like swelling or difficulty breathing, chest pain, fainting, or unusual bleeding.