



Nurturing and nourishing mental health

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A private outpatient group practice

OFFICES:

67 South Bedford Road
Mt. Kisco, NY 10549
Phone: 914-244-1904

1075 Central Park Ave • Suite
412 Scarsdale, NY 10583
Phone: 914-472-4019

INTERNET:

<http://www.cedarassociates.com>

[Email: newsletter@cedarassociates.com](mailto:newsletter@cedarassociates.com)

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Monthly Support Group for Persons with Eating Disorders, Scarsdale Office. \$10 Call for details and reservation - 914 472-4019 For information about the group([click for details](#))

Monthly Support Group for Families of Eating Disorder Sufferers, Mt. Kisco Office. \$10 (\$15 per couple) Call for details and reservations - 914 244-1904, mailbox 2 For information about the group([click for details](#))

The Body's Experience of Pregnancy and Childbirth

Elissa Zelman, Psy.D.
Director, Cedar Associates
Scarsdale

For many women being pregnant and giving birth are extraordinary experiences. However, for other women who struggle with eating disorders, these experiences are filled with dread, terror and body mistrust. The occurrence is often one that is wrought with trauma and disconnect, yet rarely is processed or discussed.

If we stop to think about being pregnant and giving birth, most of us recognize that it is the most natural process in the world. In fact, the woman's body was designed to undergo this process, if she so chooses to move in that direction. However, our culture with its emphasis on the "body ideal" complicates this process for how women experience life in (or out of) their bodies. It is the rare exception for a woman in this country to feel at peace with and/or trusting of her body. Rather, most women go to the opposite extreme, hating their bodies and attempting to alter them through painful and dangerous mechanisms.

Couple this with the highly medicalized process of giving birth in America. There has been much written on this topic highlighting the anxiety that has dominated this natural process, and has, in part, caused the "business" of birthing (Katz Rothman, 1991; Burkhardt et al, 2008; Tuschoff et al, 2008). What results is a woman who's gone through life highly mistrustful and discontented with her body whose anxiety is further heightened during the tumultuous journey of pregnancy and birthing.

Women who I have spoken to that have embraced pregnancy and birthing, describe it as a natural process of trusting one's body to make and adjust to changes that it needs, extending to doing what is necessary to birth the baby in a safe manner. For these women, a doctor who wants to schedule an induction because s/he is going on vacation or a nurse who pushes an epidural is not nearly as influential as they would be on the woman who mistrusts her body. That is because she has an internal confidence in her body and the fact that she, knows best what she needs. For many of our patients who struggle with eating disorders it is often quite the opposite experience. She has little to no confidence in her body to take care of her, and in fact, feels angry at and alienated from her "whale" of a body. Thus, she is much more vulnerable to others' suggestions of what she and her body need during pregnancy and birthing.

Please click [here](#) to read more of this letter on our web site.

19th Annual Renfrew Center Foundation Conference for Professionals,
Feminist Perspectives and Beyond: The Art and Science of Eating Disorders Treatment.
Philadelphia Airport Marriott, Philadelphia, PA from November 12 - 15, 2009. For more information, please visit: www.renfrew.org

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COMPULSIVE OVEREATERS EMOTIONAL EATING GROUP
CEDAR Associates is proud to offer a Compulsive Overeaters Emotional Eating Group.

For women ages 30 –65
Thursday nights from 7:45-9pm
1075 Central Avenue, Scarsdale, NY. Call 914-472-4019 for more information.