

Planning for Postpartum: Evidence-Based Components of Health & Wellness

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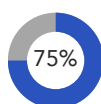
Key Facts: Maternal Mental Health (MMH)



You are not alone.

1 in 5 Mothers are Impacted by Mental Health Conditions

Maternal mental health (MMH) conditions are the **MOST COMMON** complication of pregnancy and birth, affecting 800,000 families each year in the U.S.^{1,2}



You deserve to be well.

Most Women are Untreated, Increasing Risk of Negative Impacts

75% of women impacted by maternal mental health conditions **REMAIN UNTREATED**, increasing the risk of long-term negative impacts on mothers, babies, and families.⁴



Your mental health must be taken seriously.

Mental Health Conditions are a Leading Cause of Maternal Deaths

Mental health conditions are a **LEADING CAUSE** of maternal mortality, accounting for 22% of pregnancy-related deaths.³



It's not just postpartum and depression.

There are a Range of Maternal Mental Health (MMH) Conditions

MMH conditions can occur during pregnancy and up to one year following pregnancy. They include depression, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar illness, psychosis, and substance use disorders.⁵



Knowing if you are high-risk can help you seek the right support.

Specific Communities are at Increased Risk for Maternal Mental Health (MMH) Conditions

High-Risk Communities by Race and Ethnicity

Specific communities have a higher risk of MMH conditions due to structural racism and discrimination, exclusion from research, barriers to accessing support, lack of culturally appropriate care, among other issues. Those impacted include but are not limited to:

- American Indian and Alaska Native people⁶
- Asian American and Pacific Islander people⁷
- Black and African American people⁸
- Hispanic and Latino/a/x people⁹
- South Asian people¹⁰

Additional Risk Factors

The following experiences or events can also increase a woman's risk for experiencing MMH conditions:

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)¹¹
- Current or previous military service as an active duty service member or spouse¹²
- Birth trauma¹³
- Disabilities¹⁴
- Poverty¹⁵
- Infant in the NICU¹⁶
- Personal or family history of mental health disorders¹⁷
- Intimate partner violence during pregnancy¹⁸



Scan the QR code to get a digital version of this fact sheet with clickable links.

Factors that Can Impact Your Health and Wellness



- ▶ Almost all women who experience maternal mental health conditions can recover with a combination of some or all of the resources, strategies, and supports that are outlined in this fact sheet.



- ▶ The perinatal period (pregnancy and the first year following pregnancy) can be extremely challenging for both the brain and body. It changes your life both internally and externally, which is why it is important to prepare for this time to protect your health and well-being.



- ▶ Most maternal mental health conditions are temporary and treatable.



As a policy advocacy organization, it is a core part of our mission to advocate for policies and programs that can help make pregnancy and postpartum experiences safer, healthier, and more positive for all. Learn more about our work at: mmhla.org/what-we-do



- ▶ Not having access to critical resources and safe environments can make it challenging to have a healthy and positive pregnancy and postpartum experience. We share this not to discourage you, but to encourage you to use as many supports and interventions as possible and to assure you that it is not your fault if you are struggling during or following pregnancy.



- ▶ Although many other [countries](#) prioritize the immediate postpartum period to help new parents transition and recover, the United States does not currently have a national culture or policies that support new parents. While the components provided in this fact sheet can be supportive of your health and wellness, there are also societal, political, and structural factors in the United States -- many of which are beyond our personal control -- that can negatively impact your overall health and wellness. Some of these factors include a lack of paid family and medical leave, affordable childcare, accessible and culturally competent health care, stable housing, healthy food and water, and safety.

Components of Postpartum Health and Wellness

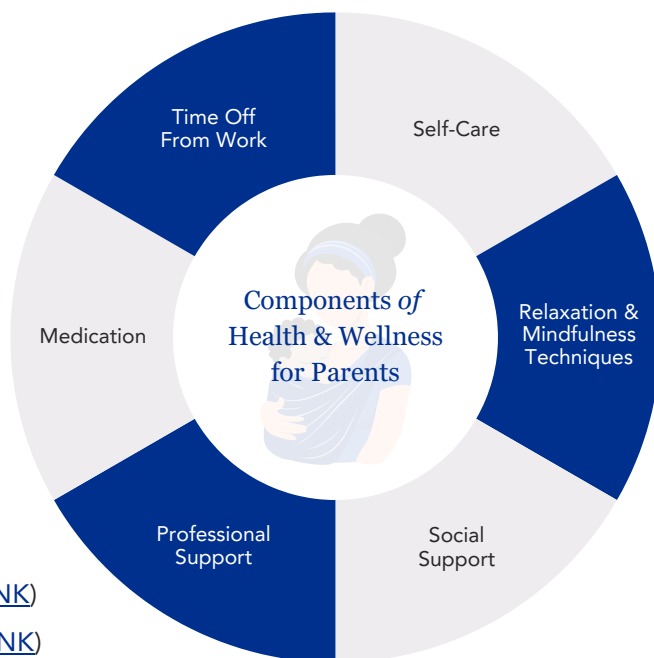
A combination of some or all of these components can help support your health and well-being.

Time Off From Work

Being a new parent is a demanding job. It requires being on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All new parents should have time off from work to recover and recharge, especially if feeling overwhelmed. The American Psychiatric Association highlighted research proving that parental leave protects against poor mental health in the postpartum period.¹⁹

In the United States, you and/or a family member may be eligible for job-protected and/or paid time off from work depending on employer policies, The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and state paid family and medical leave laws. Learn more about legal rights to have time off:

- 🔗 Job Protection: The Family and Medical Leave Act ([LINK](#))
- 🔗 Paid Time Off: State Paid Family and Medical Leave Laws ([LINK](#))
- 🔗 Employment Issues Related to Pregnancy, Birth and Nursing ([LINK](#))
- 🔗 What to Expect from Your Employer When You're Expecting ([LINK](#))
- 🔗 Know the Difference: Mandatory vs Voluntary Paid Leave Laws Across the U.S. ([LINK](#))



Self-Care

New parents often need extra care during the emotional and physical recovery from pregnancy and childbirth. Being a new parent, caring for a newborn, and maintaining a home and family are challenging, especially if the new parent(s) feels anxious, depressed, or overwhelmed.

Relaxation and Mindfulness Techniques

Research shows that relaxation and mindfulness can support mental well-being.²⁰ Find relaxation and mindfulness resources here: ([LINK](#)).

Social Support

New parents can feel isolated and alone as they manage the never-ending routine of caring for a newborn who needs all-day, hands-on care. Families, friends, neighbors, and faith-based communities can provide social support including non-judgmental listening, guidance and suggestions, and practical support such as preparing meals, providing childcare, and running errands.

Professional Support

Doulas, lactation consultants, certified peer support specialists, home visiting programs, behavioral health coaching, and counseling/therapy, can provide support and fulfill a variety of responsibilities for the parents and their family. Some of these services can even be covered by Medicaid and other health insurance plans.

Medication

Medication is sometimes needed to treat maternal mental health conditions. There are safe and effective medications to take during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. Consult with your obstetric and psychiatric providers to learn what medication options are suitable for you. See the last page for a list of medication resources.



Postpartum Support International has many free resources for parents:

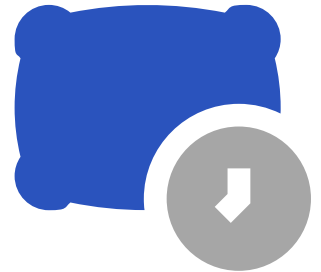
- [Postpartum Plan](#)
- [Online Support Groups](#)
- [Directory of Therapists](#)

The Different Types of Self-Care You Need

Taking care of a new baby is time- and energy-consuming work. It is important for new parents to care for themselves so they can maintain their health and well-being and care for others. Here are some ways to practice REAL self-care.

Sleep

Getting 4-5 hours of uninterrupted sleep is one of the most effective things a new parent can do to maintain their health and well-being. Brainstorm with your partner, friends, and family about how to maximize sleep. Try sleeping in a different room than your baby and splitting the night shift with another adult (partner, grandparent, friend) who can care for the baby for a few hours so that you can get uninterrupted sleep.²¹

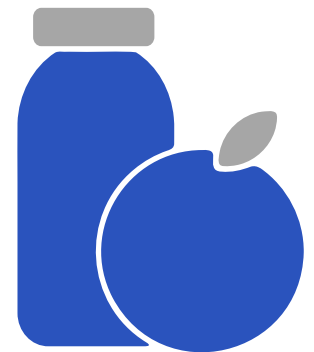


Physical Activity

Physical activity has been shown to significantly reduce the risk of postpartum depression. While experts recommend working toward 90 minutes a week, even small amounts of light physical activity, such as 15 minutes of yoga or a 20-minute walk each day, can be helpful. Try heading outside! A change of scenery, fresh air, Vitamin D from the sun, and endorphins released in the body can all have a positive impact on your mood.²²

Nutrition and Hydration

As a general rule, parents who are breastfeeding should eat and drink water every time they breastfeed. It is recommended to eat a healthy and wide-ranging diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, low-fat or fat-free dairy milk or yogurt (or lactose-free dairy or fortified soy versions), and a variety of proteins such as seafood, lean meats, poultry, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, and eggs. It is also advised to limit foods and beverages high in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Try setting up a special feeding station for yourself; fill a cooler with healthy snacks and water for easy access.^{23, 24}



Regular Breaks from Parenting

It is important as a parent to take breaks from parenting. Even 15 minutes a day doing something that YOU enjoy -- such as taking a warm shower, reading a book, watching a TV show, talking with a friend, or enjoying your favorite beverage -- can be restorative. Doing activities that restore you, or "fill your cup," help to protect your mental and physical health and give you the energy needed to meet the responsibilities of parenting.²⁵



TIP: At the end of each day, take stock of what has been accomplished — such as the number of feedings and diaper changes, plus holding, loving, and nurturing the baby — rather than focusing on all the things that did not get done.

Social and Professional Support

No one is meant to raise a child on their own. Building a support system around you is essential for a positive pregnancy and postpartum experience. A combination of social and professional support is often most helpful.

Social Support		
Emotional Support	Educational Support	Practical Support
• Empathy • Non-judgmental listening • Encouragement • Community / a sense of belonging	• Guidance and suggestions • Information and resources • Sharing experiences	• Preparing meals • Providing childcare • Running errands • Doing laundry • Tidying the house

Professional Support	
Doulas	Doulas are non-medical, pregnancy and postpartum support professionals who provide education, and practical and emotional support for the mother and family. Learn More
Lactation Consultants	Lactation consultants are healthcare professionals who specialize in breastfeeding. They help with various breastfeeding issues, such as latching, milk supply, and positioning. Learn More
Certified Peer Support Specialists	Certified peer support specialists are non-clinical behavioral health providers who have lived experience with mental illness and/or substance abuse in addition to formal training and state certification to support others in their recovery journey. Learn More
Home Visiting Programs	Home visiting programs are designed to improve the overall health of mothers and children. They help get children ready to succeed in school; improve families' economic well-being; and connect families to other resources in their community. Learn More
Behavioral Health Coaching	Behavioral health coaching helps parents manage challenges and work towards goals. This model of care uses practical strategies to provide immediate relief and support. Learn More
Counseling / Therapy	Several types of therapy, including cognitive behavioral therapy and interpersonal therapy, have been proven to help alleviate MMH conditions. Therapy during the pregnancy and postpartum period is often short-term, practical, and focused on symptom relief. Postpartum Support International (PSI) is the leading resource to find therapists and/or psychiatric providers who specialize in MMH. PSI also offers free online and in-person support groups. Learn More
Digital Platforms and Telehealth Services	Online platforms, digital therapeutics, and telehealth services are fairly new and evolving resources to support positive maternal health and mental health outcomes. Below are a few platforms and services that MMHLA recommends: • Babyscripts provides risk recognition and response. • Lunajoy and Mavida Health offer therapy and medication management. • MammaLift Plus is the first FDA-approved prescription app to treat MMH symptoms. • Pregnancy+ is the #1 pregnancy app in the world. • Seven Starling provides peer support, therapy, and medication management. • Soulside offers group support and 24/7 text chat.

Help is available any time of the day or night.

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline

1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)

24/7 | Voice and Text | English and Spanish | Translation in 60 languages | [Learn More](#)

Medication Resources

- ☑ National Library of Medicine: Drugs and Lactation Database ([LINK](#))
- ☑ The benefit or risk of medications and other exposures during pregnancy and while breastfeeding ([LINK](#))
- ☑ Summaries on the effects of medications, chemicals, infections, and physical agents on pregnancy, reproduction, and development ([LINK](#))
- ☑ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Overview of Medicine and Pregnancy. ([LINK](#))

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