

Understanding Maternal Mental Health During Pregnancy and Postpartum

Understand emotional changes. Recognize when to seek support. Explore available options.

● What does maternal mental health mean?

Maternal mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being during pregnancy and after childbirth. Changes in mood, sleep, daily responsibilities, relationships, and health can affect how someone feels. Some experiences are temporary; others may need professional evaluation and care.

● Understanding different experiences

Baby blues:

Short-term mood changes, tearfulness, worry, or feeling overwhelmed may begin in the days after birth and generally improve within about two weeks. Symptoms that persist, intensify, or affect daily functioning deserve attention.

Perinatal depression:

Depression can occur during pregnancy or after birth. Possible signs include ongoing sadness, loss of interest, hopelessness, significant changes in sleep or appetite, and difficulty managing everyday tasks.

Perinatal anxiety:

Anxiety may involve ongoing worry or fear that is difficult to control, physical tension, sleep problems, or changes in activities due to fear. Depression and anxiety can occur together or separately.

Other conditions:

Some people experience obsessive-compulsive symptoms, trauma-related symptoms, or other mental health conditions during this period. A qualified clinician can assess symptoms and discuss appropriate care.

● What might someone notice?

- Persistent sadness, irritability, or feeling unusually anxious
- Loss of interest, feeling hopeless, or difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping even when there is an opportunity to rest
- Worry or distress that interferes with daily life
- Difficulty connecting with the baby or managing usual responsibilities

These experiences do not, by themselves, establish a diagnosis. A health professional can help distinguish mental health symptoms from other medical or life circumstances.

● What support options are available?

Options may include speaking with an obstetric clinician or primary care professional, mental health screening, therapy, medication when clinically appropriate, peer support, and help with practical needs. Treatment decisions should consider the individual's symptoms, preferences, pregnancy or feeding circumstances, and clinician guidance. Do not start or stop prescribed medication without discussing it with your clinician.



When is help urgent?

New hallucinations, delusions, marked confusion, or severely disorganized behavior after birth may indicate postpartum psychosis, a medical emergency. **Call 911 or seek emergency care.** If someone has thoughts of suicide or is in emotional crisis, **call or text 988**; for immediate danger, **call 911**. Do not wait for a scheduled appointment.



My Well-Being & Support Plan

Private printable worksheet: for the family's own use. It is not a screening instrument, diagnosis, or document OH FAMILY collects.

1 What changes or concerns would I like to discuss?

What I have noticed about my mood, sleep, energy, worries, or day-to-day life:

2 What kinds of support might be useful? (Check any that apply)

- ☐ A conversation with a health professional
- ☐ Help understanding screening or treatment options
- ☐ Help with rest, meals, transportation, or household responsibilities
- ☐ Someone to talk to or a peer support group
- ☐ Help arranging childcare or attending an appointment
- ☐ Other: _____

3 Questions I may want to ask a professional

- ☐ What could be contributing to these symptoms?
- ☐ What screening or evaluation is available?
- ☐ Which support or treatment options are available during pregnancy or postpartum?
- ☐ What are possible benefits, risks, and alternatives?
- ☐ How and when should I follow up?

My additional question:

4 My next step and support contacts

Person or service to contact:

Next step:

How to contact them:

Date or follow-up reminder:

Trusted sources and support

National Institute of Mental Health — Perinatal Depression

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/perinatal-depression>

ACOG — Postpartum Depression

<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/postpartum-depression>

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline — free, confidential support 24/7: call or text 1-833-852-6262

<https://mchb.hrsa.gov/national-maternal-mental-health-hotline/faq>

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists — Depression During Pregnancy

<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/depression-during-pregnancy>

ACOG — Anxiety and Pregnancy

<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/anxiety-and-pregnancy>

For suicidal crisis: call/text 988. For immediate danger or symptoms suggesting postpartum psychosis: 911 or an emergency department.

Explore further with OH FAMILY

<https://www.ohfamilyinc.org> — Family Well-Being resources.

About this guide

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Disclosure: This guide provides general educational information, not medical advice, diagnosis, or individualized treatment. Experiences and available services vary. A qualified health professional can help assess symptoms and discuss options. The worksheet is optional and intended for personal use; it is not a clinical screening tool. Seek emergency help for immediate safety concerns.