



Postpartum Mental Wellness

Toolkit



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Parents-to-be

do so much to get ready for the big day! They prep their bodies with good food and vitamins. They prep their homes with smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, and safe and useful baby gear. They prep their expectations with classes about childbirth, feeding, CPR, and even on the Fourth Trimester/5 S's (our Happiest Baby tips).

But far too often, there's no prep for the giant emotional rollercoaster a baby can bring. So much joy...and so much exhaustion. Going from cuddling a sweetly sleeping baby...to trying to comfort a tiny, red-faced infant screaming at the top of their lungs.

Today's parents are the most educated in history, but they are also the least experienced when it comes to baby care. (Many new parents have never even held a baby before having their own!) And, unlike families in the past, most contemporary new parents have few helpful relatives living close by. That means when new moms and dads struggle, they often feel alone.

Bottom line, we need sweeping changes in our culture to get new parents the support they need—and deserve—as they raise our next generation. How can we do that? There are some pretty obvious and effective policies we can immediately put into action: paid parental leave, doula and home visiting nurse initiatives, expanded access to infant care, and programs that offer parents practical education and support to successfully calm crying and improve sleep. Together, these are steps we can take that will improve wellness, bonding, and physical and mental health...and have immediate benefits far beyond the costs.

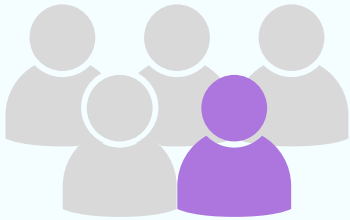
As a small step in this direction, I hope our Postpartum Mental Wellness Toolkit gives you—and your village—strategies to lighten your concerns, boost your confidence, and give you the happiest launch into parenthood.

In good health,



Harvey Karp, MD, FAAP
CEO & Founder
Happiest Baby

Mental stress is one of the most common challenges of pregnancy and childbirth.



1 in 5

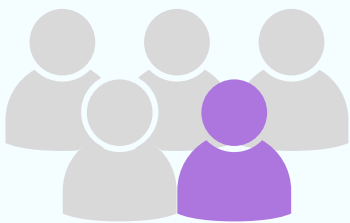
birthing people are affected by mental health conditions, like depression and anxiety.

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Up to 4 in 5

new mothers experience "baby blues."

Pediatrics



1 in 5

new moms with major depression have thoughts of harming themselves.

BMC Research Notes

Of those with serious mental stress during pregnancy or the first year of Baby's life...

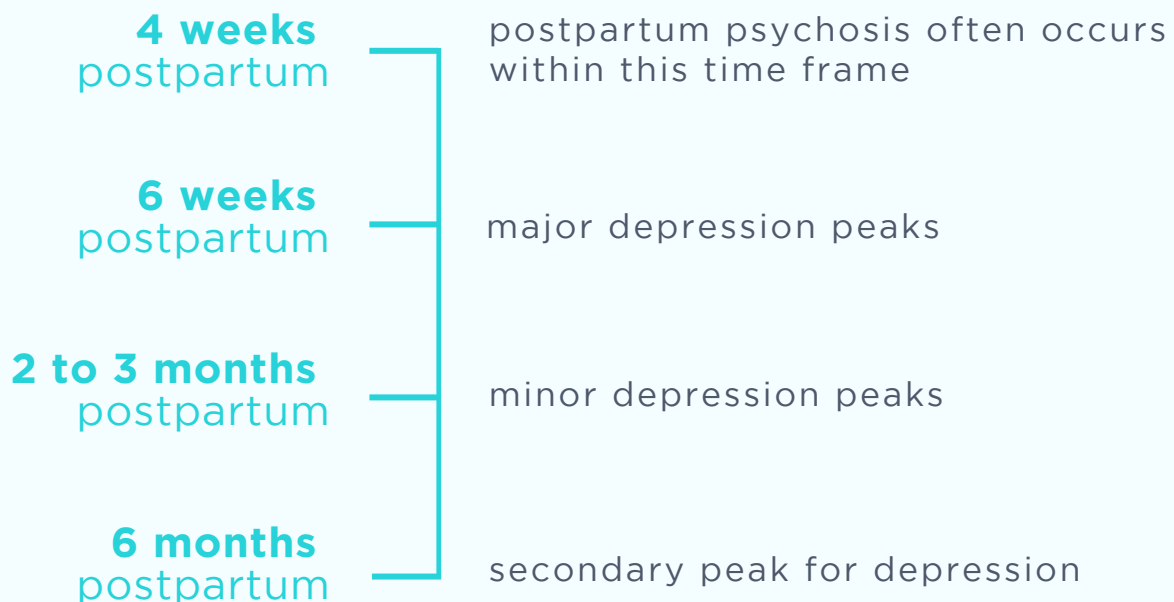
27% enter pregnancy with depression or anxiety

33% develop symptoms during pregnancy

40% develop symptoms following childbirth

JAMA Psychiatry

Symptoms may not show up right away, and postpartum depression may persist **3 years after giving birth.**



Pediatrics

3 Main Factors That Facilitate Maternal Mental Wellness:

1

Partner advocacy

2

Social support

3

Prior awareness and experience living with maternal mental health disorders

3 Biggest Barriers to Maternal Mental Wellness:

1

Worry about being judged

2

Healthcare provider's lack of knowledge of maternal mental health problems

3

Too little paid parental leave

Policy Center for Maternal Mental Care

Map out your postpartum plan.

The text is surrounded by several white, five-pointed stars of varying sizes. There are three small stars on the left side, one large star below them, and a cluster of four stars on the right side.

The following exercises were designed to help you stay happier—and less stressed—during your new life with Baby.

Know if you're at increased risk for mental stress.

While any new parent can experience postpartum stress, here are some things that may up your risk. Check the ones that apply to you...then bring this list to your doctor to discuss.

- Are you a first-time parent?
- Are you younger than 25 years old?
- Are you expecting (or do you have) twins or more?
- Have you had stressful things happen to you recently?
- Are you experiencing financial or employment problems?
- Do feel you're struggling because you lack social support?
- Do you have a family history of depression, anxiety, or mental illness?
- Do you have a personal history of depression, anxiety, or mental illness?
- Have you experienced sexual or personal violence?
- Would you describe your co-parenting relationship as "poor"?
- Are you stressed about childcare?
- Did you sleep poorly during pregnancy?
- Did you have health problems during pregnancy, like preeclampsia or diabetes?
- Did you have an emergency c-section?
- Would you describe your birth as "negative" or "traumatic"?
- Did you experience complications after delivery, such as continued pain?
- Does your baby cry excessively?
- Do you find it hard to comfort your baby or predict their needs?
- Does your baby have special needs, like prematurity or worrisome health problems?

“Maternal mental health disorders [are] less about what happens inside a mom’s brain and more about what happens in the world around her.”

Perigee Fund

Keep (and share!) this list of warning signs.

Familiarize yourself with these common mental stress red flags.
Give a copy to your loved ones so they can help support you, too.

- Feeling super tired and without energy
- Having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Crying often or for no reason
- Feeling extra anxious
- Having heart palpitations, periods of panic, or feeling it's hard to breathe
- Fearing you're not a good parent, feeling guilty and disappointed in yourself
- Feeling on edge and worrying much more than usual
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling sad, restless, hopeless, extra irritable, or angry
- Feeling isolated or wanting to avoid your loved ones
- Having thoughts of running away or abandoning your baby
- Feeling "out of your body," like you're a different person watching yourself
- Experiencing hallucinations or delusions
- Lack of interest in your baby or difficulty bonding with your baby
- Having thoughts of hurting your baby
- Wishing you were dead
- Having thoughts of hurting yourself or ending your life

Ready your village!

It can be hard to spot your own mental stress! Here's how to clue in your inner circle about what to watch—and how to help.

STEP 1

Establish your village.

Say this to your inner circle: "Before my baby comes, I'm making a list of people I can contact for support who'll help me stay strong and healthy. Can I put you on my special list?"

STEP 2

Send each member a list of things to look out for.

Send them page 10 of this toolkit. Say: "I'd love all my favorite people to help me if they see me suffering with signs of mental stress. Please take a look!"

STEP 3

Give loved ones permission to help!

Tell them: "If you think that I am struggling or not acting right, I give you permission to call my doctor at _____ and help make an appointment and get me there."

My mental-wellness village is made up of:

Real talk: When emotions run high, others' attempts to help can make us bristle. In those moments, remember that you tapped your village for a reason!

Make the most of your 6-week checkup.

You'll want to see your your OB/GYN or midwife to make sure you're recovering from the rollercoaster of giving birth. While you're there, share how you're feeling, even if you're worried it isn't "normal." Are you nervous all the time? Crying? Having unwanted thoughts?

You might even consider setting up another visit 6 weeks later when exhaustion can really hit hard (that's when depression may peak).

Pro tip: If you have a history of mental stress, think about getting a therapist before you give birth so you don't have to worry about finding one when you're in the thick of new parenthood.

Psst! A telemedicine visit in your home with a mental health pro can be easy to arrange!



Get your postpartum Rx squared now.

If you're on medications for any reason, you've likely already had a heart-to-heart with your doctor regarding your medication strategy during pregnancy. (If you have not, please do!) Next up: Figure out a postpartum medication game plan with your prescribing doctor...and be prepared for what-ifs. For example, it may be a good idea to get your postpartum prescription filled before your baby arrives...and bring that Rx to the hospital so it's ready if needed. Sometimes just knowing it's there—whether you need it or not—can be a great comfort.



PRO TIP

If you're pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant and have a mood disorder, speak with a therapist who specializes in helping new parents.

They diagnose and manage anxiety and depression throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period.

Be your own



mental wellness champion!

Your provider is supposed to screen you for mental health concerns at your 6-week postpartum visit. And your pediatrician should screen you at your baby's 1-, 2-, 4-, and 6-month well-child visits.

Despite this, less than 50% of new moms are screened for PPD.

Use these scripts to help get your mental health on your doc's radar:

At your prenatal appointments, say...

- ♥ "I've been thinking a lot about staying mentally strong after I give birth, and I would like you to screen me every time I'm here."
- ♥ "How comfortable are you helping new parents with emotional health issues?"
- ♥ "Who would you recommend as a therapist for new parents to support postpartum mental wellness?"

When interviewing pediatricians, ask...

- ♥ "Do you screen new parents for postpartum depression at babies' well visits?"
- ♥ "How do you handle new parents who show symptoms of emotional stress?"
- ♥ "Can you recommend a therapist who specializes in pregnancy and postpartum mental health?"

**New moms screened for
postpartum depression
are more likely
to seek treatment.**

BMC Psychiatry

Plan tomorrow's to-dos today.

Think about how you will handle everyday tasks after Baby arrives! List all of your daily to-dos in the chart on page 17. Then, pencil in who will do which chore (it could be you, a partner, a friend, or someone you hire).

Get help if possible!

You don't have to do everything yourself! Ask friends and family or hire an extra pair of hands.

People love to help new parents!

Tasks to offload:

- ♥ Cleaning
- ♥ Groceries
- ♥ Sibling pick-up
- ♥ Laundry
- ♥ Meal prep
- ♥ Pet care

Who will do the following? Here's an example!

Task	Who is responsible?	Notes
Feed Baby	MM	DD gives bottle before bed starting at 2 weeks
Make Meals	DD	Takeout on Tuesdays & Fridays
Walk Dog	MM(am)DD(pm)	
Laundry	Fluff & Fold Service	Schedule pickup for Mon @10am



Task	Who is responsible?	Notes
Feed Baby		
Make Meals		
Bedtime Routine		
Outside Time With Baby		
Change Diapers		
Bathe Baby		
Soothe Baby		
Clean Kitchen		
Laundry		
Take Out Trash/Diapers		
Pet Care		



Set visitor boundaries.

Establishing boundaries can help you from feeling overwhelmed. Designate a non-birthing-parent (or other helper) to handle the deluge of can-we-meet-the-baby requests. Here's some language they can use...

Set visitor expectations with phrases like:

“ We're excited to start scheduling visits from Baby's new fan club in a few days! Feel free to contact [NAME] (not Mom, she's resting) to set up a time. We've had all the surprises we can handle right now, so please text/call/email if you're thinking about coming by!

”

And when you confirm visitors, try something like this:

“ We can't wait to see you at 2pm! Baby should be awake and ready for cuddles before dozing again around 3:30. We're sorry for the brief visit, but we're so excited for you to meet Baby. PS: If you're not feeling well or have been around anyone sick, give us a heads up so we can reschedule. Otherwise, see you soon!

”

Figure out...

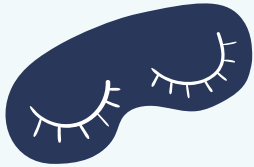
- ♥ Who's allowed to visit the hospital and at home?
- ♥ Is anyone NOT allowed?
- ♥ How long should visits be?
- ♥ What word or phrase can I use to signal that I'm ready for our visitor to leave?
- ♥ How can we answer the “Do you need anything?” question?

Think along the lines of...

- “Pick up _____”
- “Bring over some food”
- “Call coworkers”
- “Walk with the dog”

Receiving treatment for
postpartum depression
results in healthy brain
changes for Baby.

Wiley's Depression & Anxiety



Make a postpartum sleep plan.

Sleep deprivation chips away at your health.

It shortens your fuse, slows your thinking, and leads to the same brain changes as being drunk. Fatigue also raises postpartum depression and anxiety.

“New parent exhaustion is a health crisis that’s triggered tens of billions in health costs.”

Dr. Harvey Karp



#1

Assemble an overnight village.

1 in 3 new moms feel guilty about asking for help. But in the past, parents always had help soothing babies overnight.

Nights may seem lonely, but you don't have to go them alone! Take time to think: **Who could be part of your overnight village?**

Check all that apply.

- Postpartum doula
- "Mother's helper"
- Nanny
- Night nurse
- SNOO
- Family member
- Newborn-care specialist
- White noise machine
- _____
- _____





#2

Create an overnight schedule.

Hammer out a sleep plan that allows you and another caregiver to divide and conquer nights. Some options:

♥ **Nightly Shift Schedule**

Split your evenings into “on” and “off duty” shifts. Your partner may take the first shift, caring for your baby’s needs until midnight while you snooze. Then you take over while your partner sleeps. Then, switch it up one more time before the day starts.

♥ **One Night On, One Night Off**

Alternate overnights: You spend a full night on duty, then the next night your partner is on duty while you rest (ideally in another room!).

♥ **Exclusive Breastfeeding Schedule**

For those who aren’t using bottles, share non-feeding responsibilities: One parent feeds the baby while the other burps, changes, re-swaddles, and puts Baby back in the bassinet.





#3

Learn the 5 S's.



Once the feedings are going well (usually after one to two weeks), you can start to boost your baby's sleep with the 5 S's.

The 5 S's use womb-like sensations to activate a baby's innate calming reflex—their “off switch” for crying and “on switch” for ZZZs.

The Power of Sleep

Australian researchers found that 33% of the new moms they studied had some level of depression. But 3 weeks after a 45-minute infant sleep consultation, only 5% remained feeling depressed—with similar results for anxiety and stress.

BMJ Open



Dr. Harvey Karp's 5 S's

- S** waddling
- S** ide/stomach position (for soothing—never for sleep)
- S** hushing (white noise)
- S** winging (gentle motion)
- S** ucking (pacifier)





PRO TIP

Consider a dream feed, where you gently rouse your sleeping baby between 10pm and midnight to “fill their tank” before you put them back down and you hit the hay.



Dr. Harvey Karp



Give your expectations a reality check.

62% of parents say they feel pressure to live up to unrealistic expectations. Perhaps that's part of the reason **73%** say becoming a parent was one of the most difficult times of their lives.

Remember, you are still a good parent even when...



your baby wakes through the night



you don't have a schedule



your baby cries a lot



feeding is hard



bonding takes time



you need help



parenting doesn't feel intuitive



you don't love every moment



being home with your baby is boring or lonely

Talk yourself up.



In trying times, there's no better cheerleader for you than...YOU! Reciting or—better yet—jotting down self-affirmations can be an empowering exercise. Plus, research suggests they may help buffer against stress and fear of judgement. So print this page and hang it on your mirror!

When the going gets tough, repeat after us...

"I am the best parent for my baby."

"I deserve help."

"This is only a season. It's not forever."

"Being present is more important than being perfect."

"Doing what's best for my mental wellbeing is doing what's best for my baby."

"Parenthood isn't easy, but I can do hard things."

"I am still a good parent, even on bad days."

"I love my baby, and my baby loves me."

Write your future self a note.

Fast-forward to you, post-birth.

Write "Future You" a note that you can revisit when you need a reminder that you're doing great...you will get through this...and you don't
* have to do it alone!

Dear _____ ,

You did it! You just went through one of the toughest experiences in life...giving birth! You're amazing and strong! Please be gentle with yourself. Your body and mind need time to recover. Remember, _____ and _____ are here to love and support you. Be honest with them about how you feel. Don't be afraid to ask for help. You are not expected to instantly know how to be a parent. Call or text _____ or _____ with questions (or just to vent!).

Many new parents notice that the stress gets harder as the weeks go by and exhaustion sets in...if you feel like that, say something to _____ and call your provider _____.

Taking care of yourself IS taking care of your baby!

Love,

Me

Remember who you are...

These activities always make me feel good:

These things help me feel safe:

I'm more than a parent.
I'm also:



Emotional & Mental Wellness Resources

For free access to mental health support...

National Maternal Health Hotline

Text or call 1-833-943-5746
TTY users: 711 + 1-833-943-5746

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
TTY users: 1-800-487-4889

Postpartum Support International (PSI)

Text or call 1-800-944-4773
Text 971-203-7773 for Spanish

To find a therapist or postpartum support...

PSI Directory: psidirectory.com

SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator: findtreatment.gov

Psychology Today: psychologytoday.com/us/therapists

Black Female Therapists: blackfemaletherapists.com/directory

Inclusive Therapists: inclusivetherapists.com

PSI Queer & Trans Parent Support: postpartum.net/get-help/queer-parents

CandleLit Care: candlelitcare.com

Poppy Seed Health: poppyseedhealth.com

Oath: oathcare.com

In an emergency...

National Crisis Text Line

Crisistextline.org
Text HOME to 741741
Message on WhatsApp

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Text or call 988
TTY users: 711 + 988

9-1-1

If you're thinking of harming yourself or your baby, call immediately

Tape pages 28 & 29 to your fridge!



MUST-HAVE NUMBERS



My care team:

My doula:

My lactation support:

My local parent group:

My healthcare provider:

My support village:

“

No one gets through life without emotional struggles. Fortunately, there are many ways to get help: talking to friends and family, religion, meditation, exercise, therapy, even medicine.

And by sharing your feelings, you give those who love you the chance to show their love... and you teach them courage by your example.

Dr. Harvey Karp

”

About happiest baby



Founded by world renowned pediatrician Dr. Harvey Karp, Happiest Baby is a mission-driven company dedicated to helping parents raise healthy, happy children and supporting healthcare workers around the world. We're proud to create products—like SNOO Smart Sleeper—that help keep infants safer and give babies and their parents much-needed ZZZs.

SNOO is a responsive bassinet that uses secure swaddling, gentle motion, and womb-like sound to boost sleep by 1 hour a night on average. It's the first and only baby bed that the FDA has granted De Novo approval for keeping sleeping babies safely on their backs. As all parents are taught, babies who sleep on their backs are at a lower risk of infant death from rolling to a dangerous position. ([Learn important SNOO safety information here.](#))

Join the millions of parents who visit us at happiestbaby.com or Instagram ([@happiest_baby](https://www.instagram.com/happiest_baby)) for tons of free baby and toddler tips and to learn about [SNOO](#) and our other smart products—like [Sleepea](#), the award-winning, 5-second swaddle, and [SNOObie](#), our super-fun, super effective sound machine and nightlight.



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Disclaimer: The information in this document and on our site is NOT medical advice for any specific person or condition. It is only meant as general information. If you have any medical questions and concerns about your child or yourself, please contact your health provider.