



**HEALTH FOR WOMEN AND
COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION**

Stronger Women, Healthier Communities



MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH FACTSHEET

"Your mental health matters — and so do you."

1 in 5

mothers experience a perinatal mental health condition.

70%

of cases go undetected or untreated

100%

treatable with the right support and care

WHAT IS MATERNAL (PERINATAL) MENTAL HEALTH?

Maternal (perinatal) mental health refers to the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of a woman during pregnancy and in the period after childbirth (up to one year postpartum). It covers a range of mental health conditions that can arise during this significant life transition — from mild baby blues to more serious conditions requiring professional support.

Types of Maternal Mental Health Conditions

- Perinatal depression — persistent sadness, hopelessness, or emptiness during or after pregnancy
- Perinatal anxiety — excessive worry, panic attacks, or feeling unable to cope
- Postpartum psychosis — a rare but serious condition needing urgent care
- Birth-related PTSD — flashbacks or distress following a difficult birth
- OCD — intrusive thoughts, often about the baby's safety

Important Things to Know

- Any woman can be affected, regardless of age, background, or how much she wanted her baby
- Having a mental health condition does not mean you are a 'bad' mother
- It is not a sign of weakness — it is a medical condition, like any other
- Early support leads to better outcomes for both mother and baby
- Partners, fathers, and co-parents can also be affected

COMMON WARNING SIGNS

Warning signs can appear during pregnancy or after birth. They may be subtle at first. If you notice these signs in yourself or someone you know, please take them seriously.

Emotional Signs

- Persistent sadness or crying spells
- Feeling empty, numb, or hopeless
- Intense mood swings or irritability
- Feeling disconnected from your baby
- Guilt, shame, or feeling like a failure
- Loss of interest in things you once enjoyed

Physical Signs

- Sleep changes (too much or too little)
- Significant changes in appetite
- Persistent fatigue beyond new-parent tiredness
- Headaches, chest tightness, or body aches
- Difficulty breathing or heart palpitations
- No energy to care for yourself

Behavioural Signs

- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Difficulty bonding with your baby
- Neglecting basic self-care or household tasks
- Using substances to cope
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- Feeling unable to function day to day

■ If you or someone you know has thoughts of self-harm or harming the baby, **seek emergency help immediately**. This is a medical emergency.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Seek Help Right Away If You:

- Have thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- Hear voices or see things that others don't
- Feel completely unable to care for yourself or your baby
- Are severely confused or disoriented
- Have a sudden dramatic change in behaviour

Speak to a Health Worker If You:

- Feel sad, anxious, or overwhelmed for more than 2 weeks
- Are struggling to bond with your baby
- Feel like things will never get better
- Have stopped enjoying things you normally like
- Are isolating yourself from family and friends
- Find daily tasks increasingly difficult

Where to Get Help: Talk to your midwife, doctor, community health worker, or nurse. You can also reach out to a trusted family member or friend and ask them to support you in accessing care. **You do not have to face this alone.**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q1. Is it normal to feel sad after having a baby?

Many mothers experience the 'baby blues' — tearfulness and mood swings in the first 1–2 weeks. This is very common and usually passes on its own. If these feelings persist beyond two weeks or interfere with daily life, it may be postpartum depression; speak with a healthcare provider.

Q2. Can maternal mental health problems affect my baby?

Untreated conditions can affect the mother-baby bond and the baby's development. However, with appropriate support and treatment, outcomes for both mother and baby are very positive. Seeking help is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your child.

Q3. Will I be judged or have my baby taken away if I ask for help?

This fear stops many mothers from seeking support. Healthcare providers are there to help, not judge. Asking for help is a sign of strength and good parenting. The goal is to keep families together and support mothers in recovering.

Q4. Can fathers or partners also experience mental health challenges?

Yes. Up to 1 in 10 fathers or co-parents also experience postpartum depression or anxiety. Partners go through significant changes and stressors too. Everyone in the household should look after their mental health and seek support when needed.

Q5. What treatments are available?

Effective treatments include talking therapies (counselling, CBT), social and peer support, lifestyle adjustments, and in some cases medication safe for breastfeeding mothers. Treatment is tailored to each individual. Most women recover fully with the right support.

Q6. How can friends and family help?

Check in regularly — a simple 'How are you really feeling?' can make a difference. Offer practical help, listen without judgement, and avoid minimising their experience. Help them connect to professional support if they appear to be struggling.

SELF-CARE & SUPPORT TIPS FOR MOTHERS

Connect

Rest & Recover

Seek Support



- ✓ Open up to someone you trust, whether it's a friend, family member, doctor, or midwife, about how you're feeling. **Be Honest!**
- ✓ Practice calming breathing exercises when you feel overwhelmed.
- ✓ Stay physically active if possible. Move your body gently. It can boost your mood and improve your sleep.
- ✓ Focus on eating a balanced, healthy diet with regular meals.
- ✓ Sleep when you can and take breaks without guilt.
- ✓ Accept help when it is offered.
- ✓ Consider joining a mothers support group or antenatal class to connect with other parents expecting around the same time.

DOS

DON'TS

- ✗ Don't isolate yourself.
 - ✗ Avoid comparing yourself to others. Every pregnancy journey is unique.
 - ✗ Don't hesitate to share your feelings with healthcare professionals. They are there to help and support you.
 - ✗ Steer clear of using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to cope. These can worsen your mood and harm your baby's development.
- If you are receiving counselling, medication, or other care, **don't stop treatment or support without talking to a healthcare professional first**



Remember:

Asking for help is an act of love — for yourself and your baby. You deserve support. You are not alone. Recovery is possible.