

FACT SHEET

Steps to Wellness

FEBRUARY 2022

MMHLA
Maternal Mental Health
Leadership Alliance

1/5



Mental health conditions are the **MOST COMMON** complications of pregnancy and childbirth, impacting 1 in 5 individuals during pregnancy or first year postpartum.

CITATIONS

ACOG Committee Opinion 757 (2018).
Gavin (2005). Obstetrics & Gynecology, 106, 1071-83.
Fawcett (2019). Journal of Clinical Psychiatry (80)4.

KEY POINTS

Maternal mental health (MMH) conditions are the most common complications of pregnancy and childbirth, affecting 1 in 5 pregnant or postpartum patients (800,000 families each year in the United States).

Almost all individuals who experience MMH conditions can recover with a combination of self-care, social support, therapy/counseling, and medication.

Most maternal mental health conditions are temporary and treatable

STEPS TO WELLNESS

LOWER COST
LOWER BARRIER

HIGHER COST
HIGHER BARRIER

1. Self-Care

sleep, nutrition, exercise, time off

2. Social Support

from friends, family, doulas, home-visiting programs, or support groups

3. Therapy/Counseling

4. Medication

Step 1 SELF-CARE

Many new parents need care and support to recover from the physical and emotional demands of 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) feel anxious, depressed, or overwhelmed. Keeping a new baby alive is time-consuming work, and sometimes new parents feel frustrated because they think they have not accomplished anything.

TIP: At the end of the day, focus on what has been accomplished (number of feedings, burpings, diaper changes—plus holding, loving, and nurturing the baby).

All these options for self-care are free and relatively accessible for most parents.

Sleep

Getting 4-5 hours of uninterrupted sleep is one of the most effective, least expensive things a new parent can do to start feeling better. Brainstorm with partner, friends, and family how to maximize sleep.

TIP: Split the “night shift” with another adult (partner, grandparent, friend) and have that person feed the baby.



Exercise

Light exercise—such as a walk around the block—can have significant positive impact on mood. The combined effect of change of scenery, fresh air, Vitamin D from the sun, and endorphins released in the body all can be helpful.

TIP: Light yoga or stretching, along with some deep breathing, can help relieve stress.



Nutrition

New mothers should eat every time baby eats, especially if breastfeeding. Lots of water and high-protein snacks. (yogurt, nuts, cheese) can help maintain adequate hydration and calorie intake.

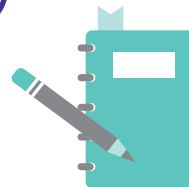
TIP: Set up a special “feeding station” with a cooler filled with snacks and water.



Time Off

No other job is as demanding as being a new parent, which requires being on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All new parents need time off to recharge and rejuvenate, especially if feeling overwhelmed.

TIP: Take 15 minutes ALONE each day to focus on self-care: take a shower, check social media, pray or meditate, write in a journal, go for a walk.



KEY TAKEAWAY: New parents must care for themselves so they can care for others.

Step 2 SOCIAL SUPPORT



Emotional

- Provide encouragement, caring, and support
- Show empathy, concern, and acceptance

Companionship

- Create sense of belonging
- Reassure new parents: You are not alone!



SOURCES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

- ✓ Family
- ✓ Friends
- ✓ Neighbors
- ✓ Faith community
- ✓ Support groups
- ✓ Doulas
- ✓ Home visiting programs



Informational

- Guidance and suggestions
- Information and resources
- Experience and insights

Tangible

- Prepare meals
- Watch children
- Run errands
- Do laundry



KEY TAKEAWAY: New parents need to know they are loved and valued.

Step 3 TALK THERAPY/COUNSELING

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

- Largest evidence base for depression
- 8-12 sessions
- Focus on cognitive restructuring



Interpersonal Therapy

- Good evidence in pregnancy and postpartum
- 12-16 sessions
- Focus on relationship and relationship problems



Mindfulness

- Developing an awareness
- Being present in the body
- Focus on changing how one relates to thoughts, feelings, sensations



KEY TAKEAWAY: Counseling during the perinatal period is often short-term, pragmatic, and focused on symptom relief.

Postpartum Support International

offers a variety of social supports for new parents and an online directory of mental health providers who specialize in treating MMH conditions.

Step 4 MEDICATION

Sometimes medication is required to treat MMH conditions. Fortunately, there are safe and effective medications for use during pregnancy and lactation.

Goals

1. Limit risk of maternal illness
2. Minimize risk of relapse
3. Minimize exposure to baby



Risks

- Taking psychotropic medication is a RISK-RISK analysis.
- There are RISKS to both taking and not taking medication.
- The answer is different for each situation, each parent, each baby.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Decisions about medication are best made in consultation with obstetric and psychiatric providers.

Medication Resources

LactMed: NIH Drugs and Lactation Database

MotherToBaby: Nonprofit service with information on safety of medications/exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding

Reprotox: Summaries of medication effects from Reproductive Technology Center

Treating For Two: CDC's website on medicine and pregnancy

Registry Information fo Pregnant Women: FDA's database of registries to help pregnant women and doctors learn more on safety of medicines used during pregnancy