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Mental Health Illness During Pregnancy

- As many as 1 in 5 women will have mood and anxiety disorders while pregnant, with the most common being depression.^{1,2}
- Only about 10% of pregnant women will seek treatment for these concerns.^{1,2}

What is maternal mental health?

Maternal mental health, also known as perinatal mental health, refers to a mother’s overall emotional, social, and mental well-being, both **during and after pregnancy**. Hormone changes that occur during pregnancy often affect mood, but there can be more serious mental health issues that may arise during and after pregnancy that may require treatment.

What are some risks of not treating a mental health condition while pregnant?^{1,3}

Risks for the baby

- Premature birth
- Infant irritability
- Developmental delays
- Low birth weight
- Sleeping and feeding troubles
- Cognitive deficits

Risks for the mother

- Poor prenatal care
- Pregnancy complications such as preterm labor, hypertension (including pre-eclampsia), anemia, and/ or diabetes.
- Depression or other mental health disorders occurring after giving birth
- Increased risk of substance use

Could this be depression, or is it the “baby blues”?

Baby Blues

- Unexplainable mood changes
- Lasts less than 2 weeks after delivery
- Generally happy feelings, with some low mood

Postpartum Depression^{3,4}

- Feeling sad, worthless, or hopeless
- Loss of interest or pleasure in life, hard time concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite
- Thoughts of harming self or the baby
- Lasts for more than 2 weeks
- Medications are often helpful, however some medications are safer than others during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Women should talk with their health care provider to determine the best treatment plan for them.
- Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant while being treated for a mental health condition should talk with their healthcare provider to closely monitor mental health changes.

What are the next steps?

- Talk with a healthcare provider if there is a mental health concern during or after pregnancy.
- Mental Health Questionnaires or “screening tools” may be used to determine if and what type of mental health condition may be occurring.
- Treatment options can include therapy and medications, alone or in combination. It is important to compare the risks and benefits of medications to those of untreated mental illness during pregnancy.

Are there available resources to learn more?

- Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Women’s Mental Health: <https://womensmentalhealth.org>
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: <https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Postpartum-Depression>
- Find a therapist near you: <https://www.psychologytoday.com>
- Information about mood symptoms and medications: <https://mothertobaby.org>
- Maternal Mental Health Alliance: <https://www.mmhla.org>



Go online to find more information about women’s mental health and to view the references for this toolkit.

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