

Understanding Mental Health and Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a life-changing event that brings significant physical, emotional, and social changes to the individual and their loved ones. While many of these changes come with positive emotions, 1 in 5 people experience depression, anxiety, or scary thoughts during or after pregnancy.¹

Reproductive policy uncertainty, conflicting messages on what's considered "safe" during pregnancy, and the challenges associated with accessing maternal healthcare can lead to negative impacts on mental health.

Use this guide to assess your mental health and to help you prepare for mental health conversations with your trusted healthcare professional.

NOTE: This guidance is not meant to replace recommendations from a healthcare or mental health professional.

What mental health changes are considered "normal" during pregnancy?

Changes in mental health and emotions are common throughout each stage of pregnancy. Hormones, physical changes, body image, stress, and fatigue are all normal and expected reasons for these changes.

FIRST TRIMESTER EMOTIONS	SECOND TRIMESTER EMOTIONS	THIRD TRIMESTER EMOTIONS
Excitement while <u>learning about your pregnancy</u> and potential worry about new parenthood.	Often referred to as the "honeymoon phase," as some <u>common pregnancy discomforts</u> fade and heightened emotions settle.	Excitement and worry may reemerge when <u>preparing for labor and delivery</u> and bringing the baby home.

Most of the emotional changes with pregnancy can be managed through a routine of self-care, nutrition, peer support, and movement, as advised by your trusted healthcare professionals.



¹ Silver, N. E. (n.d.). *What I tell my pregnant and postpartum patients about depression and anxiety*. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/experts-and-stories/the-latest/what-i-tell-my-pregnant-and-postpartum-patients-about-depression-and-anxiety>

How can I protect my mental health during pregnancy?

Attending all of your [prenatal care visits](#) is the best way to keep you and your baby mentally and physically healthy.²

When your healthcare professional can see and communicate with you regularly, they can spot and guide you through stress, uncertainties, and symptoms of mental health conditions sooner for better outcomes.

Prioritizing your mental health during pregnancy can make the journey more pleasant and lower the risks of preterm birth, low birth weight, and [challenges with parent-infant bonding](#).³

Consider the following tips from the National Alliance on Mental Illness on [how to minimize stress during pregnancy](#):

- **Set boundaries** at work, home, school, and other key settings to prioritize comfort and rest.
- **Communicate** your needs early and often, and seek support from others, including family, friends, co-parents, doulas, faith communities, and others you trust.
- **Prioritize personal time** and activities that allow relaxation, joy, and movement.
- **Plan ahead** when possible for meals, chores, and other day-to-day activities that may become difficult to manage on your own during pregnancy.

When should I seek professional support for my mental health?

Depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, psychotic disorders, and substance use disorders are the most common complications of pregnancy and birth.⁴


Knowing which signs to look out for and flagging them with your healthcare professional when they become intense, persistent, or interfere with daily life can help you get the support and treatment you need sooner. For example:

- **Anxiety:** Worry or fear about everyday situations you aren't usually worried about, or fear of doing simple tasks like leaving the house.
- **Depression:** Ongoing, intense, and sometimes unexplainable sadness, and suddenly losing interest in activities you love.⁵

Seek Out Information You Can Trust

The [American Pregnancy Association](#) has an extensive FAQ, tools, and a free, live helpline to answer your pregnancy questions and concerns.

Every confidential [call](#) or [chat](#) is with a live trained expert ready to answer your questions at every stage of your pregnancy.

 1-800-672-2296



Complications are any health problems – involving the parent's health, baby's health, or both – that occur during pregnancy.

² Learn more about accessing [free or reduced-cost prenatal care](#).

³ Hemstad, M. (n.d.). *Maternal mental health: Impact on the child* [Fact sheet]. Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance. <https://www.mmhla.org/articles/maternal-mental-health-impact-on-the-child-fact-sheet>

⁴ Hemstad, M. (n.d.). *Maternal mental health conditions and statistics: An overview* [Fact sheet]. Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance. <https://www.mmhla.org/articles/maternal-mental-health-conditions-and-statistics>

⁵ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (n.d.). *ACOG explains: Mental health and pregnancy* [Video]. <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/videos/mental-health-and-pregnancy>

- **Other Symptoms:** Difficulty taking care of yourself (i.e., eating regular meals, maintaining basic hygiene), and poor sleep can be signs of many different conditions and should be addressed as soon as possible.

Intrusive or scary thoughts can be frightening, but they can be common and treatable. Sharing them with a healthcare professional is important.

Will my mental health improve once I deliver my baby?

People are at an increased risk of depression and anxiety during the first year after childbirth than at any other time.

This includes the “baby blues,” which refers to temporary feelings of sadness, anxiety, and sometimes even anger with the new baby and others in the home. These feelings are normal and are typically attributed to the drastic hormonal shifts after labor and delivery.

In some cases, more serious mental health challenges like [postpartum depression](#) or anxiety can develop, which require immediate care from a medical professional.

Is it Baby Blues or Postpartum Depression?

	BABY BLUES	POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION
What are the symptoms?	Manageable symptoms such as crying for no clear reason, mood swings, feeling sad, irritability, and trouble sleeping.	Troublesome symptoms such as feeling hopeless, significant sadness and anxiety, and thoughts of self-harm or harming your baby.
When do symptoms start?	Symptoms begin 2 to 3 days after childbirth.	Symptoms begin in the early weeks after birth (most common) and up to one year after childbirth.
How long do symptoms last?	Symptoms last for roughly two weeks and usually resolve on their own.	Symptoms will not resolve without treatment.
What’s the daily impact?	Daily life is manageable, and you can effectively care for yourself and your baby.	Your ability to function and care for yourself and the baby are significantly impacted.

Adapted from [Do you have baby blues or something more?](#), by University of Utah Health, 2025.

Self-Help Tool: Online Mental Health Screening

Confidential online screening is one quick and easy way to better understand what mental health symptoms you might be experiencing. [Mental Health America’s online screening tool](#) is free, accurate, and offers support for how to communicate your results with your healthcare professional.

Additional Resources

Explore the additional resources below and talk with your healthcare professional for more information about protecting your mental health throughout pregnancy and beyond.

- Learn more about taking care of your mental health during pregnancy from [Nemours and the American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists](#).
- For immediate mental health support, call or text the [National Maternal Mental Health Hotline](#) at 1-833-TLC-MAMA.