**About This Resource**

**This resource has been designed by** [Maternal Mental Health NOW](http://www.maternalmentalhealthnow.org) **to help you feel prepared to adjust to the emotional demands, joys, and stressors of trying to conceive, pregnancy and parenting.** Our hope is that this tool will help you feel prepared for the major life transition you are going through, that it will support your practice of self-care, and that it will help you develop knowledge of signs and symptoms of maternal depression and/or anxiety and when you should seek help. Our intention is to help you, your baby and your family get the best start possible!

**I’m Thinking About Having a Baby**

**What changes when you are thinking about/preparing to have a baby?**

When a couple makes the decision that it is time to expand their family, they are embarking on a major life transition. If they are able to conceive quickly and easily, it’s a time of celebration! But for many couples, the process of conceiving is filled with challenges, setbacks, disappointment and sometimes loss. Many things may change, including your relationship with your partner, your sex life, your diet, your social life, etc.

**Emotional Changes**

We are offered a lot of information about the physical aspects of trying to conceive, but not as much information about the emotions we might experience during this process. It is not uncommon for women to feel the following emotions while they are trying to conceive:

* Excitement
* Happiness
* Sadness
* Disappointment
* Mood swings
* Feeling overwhelmed
* Difficulty concentrating
* Lack of interest in things you used to enjoy
* Changes in sleeping and eating habits
* Anxiety
* Guilt or inadequacy
* Feeling like your body has failed you

**Balancing Needs**

The most common piece of advice given to couples who are trying to conceive is to “relax”. As frustrating as this advice is, self-care *is* very important during this process, whether you are trying to conceive naturally or pursuing assisted reproduction, surrogacy or adoption.

*Activity: Make a list of activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Commit to doing at least one of these activities on a daily basis.*

**Circle of Support**

They say it takes a village to raise a child. The same is true when trying to conceive a child. This can be a very lonely and isolating time for couples who are struggling with infertility and loss, especially when it seems like everyone they know is getting pregnant and having babies. But at least 13% of all couples have difficulty getting pregnant so you are not alone. It is important to find these peers during this time and connect with them – online or in person. It is also important to share what is going on with your close personal relationships.

**Know When to Get Help – XX**

Feeling depressed or anxious while you are trying to conceive can be experienced in different ways, but here are the most common symptoms:

- Feeling tired for no good reason

- Feeling irritable or angry

- Feeling guilty, ashamed or hopeless

- Feeling so nervous that nothing can calm you down

- Feeling hopeless

- Feeling restless

- Feeling like everything is an effort

- Feeling so sad that nothing can cheer you up

- Feeling worthless

- Big changes in appetite – eating more or less than usual

- Difficulties concentrating

- Feeling like things that you used to enjoy are no longer interesting

- Feeling unable to look forward to anything

- Wanting to blame yourself when things go wrong

- Feeling scared or panicky for no good reason

- Feeling so overwhelmed it makes you hopeless

- Crying almost all the time, or not feeling able to stop crying

- Thoughts of harming yourself

*Activity: If you are having thoughts of harming yourself, reach out for help immediately! If you have consistently felt any of the other symptoms on this list recently, discuss them with your healthcare provider. Bring this checklist with you.*

**How to tell if you need help?**

If …

If you have are feeling down, worried or on edge for most of the day nearly every day for a period of time …

If your symptoms continue even when you are doing things that used to make you feel better …

If your symptoms are impacting your life, by creating problems with your partner, your baby, your ability to care for the baby or do your job …

It is a good idea to get some help. Getting help is important for a quick recovery and a healthy future with your baby.

**What Does Help Look Like?**

Self-care: Making adjustments in your life to reduce stress, get exercise, sleep more, or make changes in your diet.

Peer Support: Talk to friends and family members who have experienced infertility and/or loss. You will quickly learn that you are not alone.

Support Groups: These are groups that meet regularly and are facilitated by a licensed clinician and/or a peer. Facilitators bring topics for conversation and participants leave with more information and friendships with other women trying to conceive and/or who have experienced loss.

Individual Psychotherapy: One-on-one therapy with a psychologist, clinical social worker or therapists is a safe place to share all your feelings and thoughts about infertility and/or loss.

Medication: Some women require medication to manage their depression and/or anxiety and feel like themselves again.

There is not one right way. Each person has her own unique needs and circumstances. Some women may need all of help listed; others just a derivative of one. Ask your healthcare professional what treatment options are available and you can decide together what steps you should take. Or, call Postpartum Support International’s Warmline: 1.800.944.4773.

Remember - Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

**When is perinatal mental health considered an emergency?**

- If you have thoughts of hurting yourself

- If you feel like you see or hear things others can’t see or hear

In these situations, you should immediately reach out for help. Don’t suffer with scary thoughts alone, get help!

**Remember**

You are not alone.

*Maternal depression can affect any woman regardless of age, income, culture, or education.*

It is NOT your fault.

*You are not a weak or bad person for feeling this. It is a common and treatable condition. There are many factors may impact how you are feeling, including your medical history, how your body processes certain hormones, the level of stress you are experiencing, and how much help you are getting. But what we do know is that this is not your fault.*

With the right help, you will get better.

*The sooner you get treatment and support, the better. There are resources and help available.*

**I’m Pregnant**

**What changes when you are pregnant?**

Pregnancy is a time of major change. You are growing a little human being in your body! Your body undergoes tremendous changes – weight gain, nausea, sore breasts, stretch marks, sciatic pain. Other things may also change, including your relationships with your partner, your friends and family members, work colleagues, etc., your living situation, your diet and exercise routine.

**Emotional Changes During Pregnancy**

We are offered a lot of information about the physical changes of pregnancy, but not as much information about the emotional changes. It is not uncommon for women to feel the following emotions during pregnancy:

* Sadness
* Mood swings
* Feeling overwhelmed
* Difficulty concentrating
* Lack of interest in things you used to enjoy
* Changes in sleeping and eating habits
* Anxiety
* Guilt or inadequacy

If the pregnancy is unexpected, you are suffering from financial stress, you are a victim of domestic violence, you are having relationship troubles, you have just moved, or you are socially isolated, these feelings can be tremendously amplified.

**Myths of Motherhood**

Many of the beliefs and expectations we have about being a mother are based on ideas we have picked up from others: friends, family, and the media. What is particularly confusing for many expectant and new mothers is that messages about motherhood are sometimes contradictory! It can be helpful to think about which of these ideas feel true to you and which might in fact be myths that you don’t necessarily have to follow.

*Activity: Write down what you envision motherhood to be like. Why kind of mother do you want to be? What motherhood traits do you want to avoid?*

**Balancing Needs**

It important for expectant moms to take care of themselves too. Taking care of yourself is the foundation of caring well for a baby. Sometimes just finding ways to take a little time for yourself can make a big difference. Consider making time for the following activities during your pregnancy:

* Take a walk with a friend
* Read a book
* Binge a television show
* Go to the movies
* Go to the beach
* Get your nails done
* Have a massage
* Sing
* Watch a movie
* Garden
* Turn on music and dance
* Ask for and accept help from others
* Pray
* Meditate
* Journal
* Take a nap
* Cook
* Call a friend
* Do something nice for someone
* Make a cup of tea
* Take a bath
* Knit
* Do crafts

**Circle of Support**

They say it takes a village to raise a child. It also takes a village to raise a mother. Pregnancy is the perfect time to take an inventory of your relationships, reconnect with those most important to you, anticipate the help you are going to need during the postpartum period and create a postpartum action plan.

*Activity: Create your postpartum action team. Who will visit you in the hospital? Who will you call when you need dinner cooked or the house cleaned? Who will you call when you just need to cry or vent? Ask these people if they are willing to support you in these ways so that your postpartum action team is in place.*

**Connecting with the baby in the womb**

Babies growing in the womb have feelings and senses too. Babies develop hearing in the womb and can usually recognize their mother’s voice when they are born. When mothers take the time to talk or sing to their baby in the womb or connect in other ways, they begin the process of bonding and start practicing and enjoying their new role as mothers.

*Activity: Create a playlist of your favorite songs to play and sing to your baby.*

**Know When to Get Help - Prenatal Depression and Anxiety**

Feeling depressed or anxious during pregnancy can be experienced in different ways, but here are the most common symptoms:

- Feeling tired for no good reason

- Feeling irritable or angry

- Feeling nervous

- Feeling guilty, ashamed or hopeless

- Feeling so nervous that nothing can calm you down

- Feeling hopeless

- Feeling restless

- Feeling like everything is an effort

- Feeling so sad that nothing can cheer you up

- Feeling worthless

- Big changes in appetite – eating more or less than usual

- Difficulties concentrating

- Feeling like things that you used to enjoy are no longer interesting

- Feeling unable to look forward to anything

- Wanting to blame yourself when things go wrong

- Feeling scared or panicky for no good reason

- Feeling so overwhelmed it makes you hopeless

- Crying almost all the time, or not feeling able to stop crying

- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby

*Activity: If you are having thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, reach out for help immediately! If you have consistently felt any of the other symptoms on this list recently, discuss them with your healthcare provider. Bring this checklist with you.*

**How to tell if you need help?**

If …

If you have are feeling down, worried or on edge for most of the day nearly every day for a period of time …

If your symptoms continue even when you are doing things that used to make you feel better …

If your symptoms are impacting your life, by creating problems with your partner, your baby, your ability to care for the baby or do your job …

It is a good idea to get some help. Getting help is important for a quick recovery and a healthy future with your baby.

**What Does Help Look Like?**

Self-care: Making adjustments in your life to reduce stress, get exercise, sleep more, or make changes in your diet.

Peer Support: Talk to friends and family members who have been pregnant and had babies. You will quickly learn that you are not alone.

Support Groups: These are groups that meet regularly and are facilitated by a licensed clinician and/or a peer. Facilitators bring topics for conversation and participants leave with more information and friendships with other pregnant women.

Individual Psychotherapy: One-on-one therapy with a psychologist, clinical social worker or therapists is a safe place to share all your feelings and thoughts about pregnancy and new motherhood.

Medication: Some expectant mothers require medication to manage their depression and/or anxiety and feel like themselves again.

There is not one right way. Each birthing person has her own unique needs and circumstances. Some mothers may need all of help listed; others just a derivative of one. Ask your healthcare professional what treatment options are available and you can decide together what steps you should take. Or, call Postpartum Support International’s Warmline: 1.800.944.4773.

Remember - Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

**When is perinatal mental health considered an emergency?**

- If you have thoughts of hurting yourself or your baby

- If you feel like you see or hear things others can’t see or hear

In these situations, you should immediately reach out for help. Don’t suffer with scary thoughts alone, get help!

**Remember**

You are not alone.

*Maternal depression can affect any woman regardless of age, income, culture, or education.*

It is NOT your fault.

*You are not a weak or bad person for feeling this. It is a common and treatable condition. There are many factors may impact how you are feeling, including your medical history, how your body processes certain hormones, the level of stress you are experiencing, and how much help you are getting. But what we do know is that this is not your fault.*

With the right help, you will get better.

*The sooner you get treatment and support, the better. There are resources and help available.*

**I’ve Had My Baby**

**What Changes After Your Baby is Born?**

Many aspects of your life change when you have a baby - possibly all aspects. Some of the areas where parents often experience major changes are:

- Your daily schedule

- Your household budget

- Your sleep patterns

- Your relationship with your partner

- Your relationships with friends

- Your priorities on how to spend your time, money, and energy

No matter how eager we might have been to welcome our child, there will always be a sense of loss and grief for the way things were before. All new beginnings mean something ended – this can make even positive transitions difficult.

**Emotional Changes**

Some people feel absolute joy during the postpartum period. But … this is not universal. It is not uncommon for women to feel the following emotions after they give birth:

* Sadness
* Mood swings
* Feeling overwhelmed
* Difficulty concentrating
* Lack of interest in things you used to enjoy
* Changes in sleeping and eating habits
* Anxiety
* Panic Attacks
* Excessive worry about your baby
* Fearing that you can’t take care of your baby
* Guilt or inadequacy
* Difficulty accepting motherhood

It’s normal and okay if your feelings are less than happy during this adjustment. That doesn’t mean you are doing anything wrong. In fact, it is very common.

**Passing Down the Good**

Becoming a parent often encourages us to reflect upon the way that we were parented. We all have had good and difficult aspects of our upbringing. It can seem overwhelming to find out how to create the life you want for you baby, especially if you have concerns about the difficult and negative things you experienced in your own upbringing.

*Activity: Talk to someone about these concerns – your partner, your family member, a friend or a therapist. Identify the negative patterns you want to stop and the positive experiences you want to continue. This will help to “pass down the good” to your child.*

**Good Mom vs. Bad Mom**

Modern day society imposes a number of expectations on motherhood. We’ve asked groups of women and providers to create a list of what it means to be a Good Mom and what it means to be a Bad Mom. This is what they’ve come up with:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Good Mom** | **Bad Mom** |
| Good clean and styled hair  Stay at home mom  Married  Only 2 kids  Exclusively breastfeeds until baby is 2yo  PTA member  Only eats organic, homegrown farm-to-table food  Makes own baby food  Doesn’t need to sleep  Has a nice house with a yard  Doesn’t need to discipline her kids  Kids sleep through the night from birth  Clean house  Heterosexual  Has lots of sex with her husband  Older than 21, less than 35  Lost baby weight soon after birth  Always loves to be a mother  Gets pregnant on her first try | Disheveled  Works a lot  Disciplines  Gives baby formula  Yells  Uses drugs  Lives in an apartment  Depressed  Younger than 21, older than 35  Needs to take breaks from her children  Anxious  Inadequate prenatal care  Immigrant  Undocumented and uninsured  Cries a lot  Shops at the dollar store  Conceived via IVF or other assisted reproductive technology |

What this activity demonstrates is that the concept of a Good Mom is an impossible ideal. Instead, we’d like to propose the concept of a Good Enough Mom. A Good Enough Mom takes care of her own needs so that she can better care for her baby. Keep that in mind as you navigate the postpartum period.

**Balancing Needs**

It can be very challenging to take care of yourself when you have a baby. Our usual ways of attending to our needs are often not possible when we are feeding, changing and playing with our babies, on top of our other daily chores and obligations! It’s important to look at what is possible for you, in whatever amount of time you have. You might not be able to spend hours on yourself the way you used to, but you might be able to do it in smaller doses – and little goes a long way when you are parenting! When you take care of yourself, you will indirectly be taking care of your baby.

*Activity: Write out a schedule of daily and weekly activities and identify opportunities for self-care. Update this schedule as your baby grows older.*

**Circle of Support**

Are the people that you counted on as serving as a support to you during this time following through? Are there new people in your life who have suddenly showed up to be a support to you? Take a minute to identify your needs from your partner, family and friends and don’t be afraid to make very specific requests of them. Also be sure to thank and show gratitude to those who are there for you.

**Getting Sleep**

**The Importance of Sleep**

Sleep is very important – especially during the postpartum period. Sleep can restore our energy and keep us healthy. We also need to be rested to cope with stress. New motherhood brings natural challenges to sleeping. It is important to be aware of how your sleep is affected, and maybe to let go of some responsibilities so that you can get the sleep you need.

*Activity: Ask yourself - Are you able to sleep when your baby sleeps?*

*- If YES, arrange your schedule to go to bed when your baby is sleeping so you can get as much sleep as possible.*

*- If NO, it is important to reach out for help and support. Let your healthcare provider know you are unable to sleep when the baby is sleeping.*

**Promoting Sleep and Rest**

Sleep and rest are challenging for parents but it is still very important to make time for sleeping and resting, as much as possible. Here are things to consider to promote your sleep and rest:

- Make time for no activities at all.

- Use breathing to calm yourself. This promotes rest during times without activities.

- Don’t use screens (tv, phones, etc.) an hour before bedtime.

- Use relaxing music when relaxing and reduce noise and light

- Don’t drink caffeine in the hours before bedtime.

- Try to develop a regular schedule for your sleep. If you go to bed at the same time every night, your body will get used to sleeping at a regular time.

- Avoid alcohol before bedtime.

- If it’s hard to find time for sleeping, think about resting. Getting some time with your feet up is helpful, even if you aren’t sleeping. All mothers need it

**Know When To Get Help - Baby Blues" vs Postpartum Depression**

The “Baby Blues” is the experience of mood changes in the first couple of weeks after having your baby. During this time, it is normal to experience tearfulness, irritability, sadness, sleeplessness, anxiety, and exhaustion. It usually lasts between 3 to 14 days and goes away on its own. If the symptoms persist, it could be a sign of Postpartum Depression or Postpartum Anxiety.

**Postpartum Depression and Anxiety**

Feeling depressed can be experienced in different ways, but here are the most common symptoms:

- Feeling tired for no good reason

- Feeling irritable or angry

- Feeling nervous

- Feeling guilty, ashamed or hopeless

- Feeling so nervous that nothing can calm me down

- Feeling hopeless

- Feeling restless

- Feeling like everything is an effort

- Feeling so sad that nothing can cheer me up

- Feeling worthless

- Big changes in appetite – eating more or less than usual

- Difficulties concentrating

- Feeling like things that I used to enjoy are no longer interesting

- Feeling unable to look forward to anything

- Wanting to blame myself when things go wrong

- Feeling scared or panicky for no good reason

- Feeling so overwhelmed it made me hopeless

- Being unable to sleep even when my baby is sleeping

- Crying almost all the time, or not feeling able to stop crying

- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby

*Activity: If you are having thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, reach out for help immediately! If you have consistently felt any of the other symptoms on this list recently, discuss them with your healthcare provider. Bring this checklist with you.*

**How to tell if you need help?**

If …

If you have are feeling down, worried or on edge for most of the day nearly every day for a period of time …

If your symptoms continue even when you are doing things that used to make you feel better …

If your symptoms are impacting your life, by creating problems with your partner, your baby, your ability to care for the baby or do your job …

If you are unable to sleep, even when the baby is sleeping …

It is a good idea to get some help. Getting help is important for a quick recovery and a healthy future with your baby.

**What Does Help Look Like?**

Self-Care: Making adjustments in your life to reduce stress, get exercise, sleep more, or make changes in your diet. Can a family member or friend watch your baby during the day or night? Can you hire a night nurse or nanny?

Peer Support: Talk to friends and family members who have had babies. You will quickly learn that you are not alone.

Support Groups: These are groups that meet regularly and are facilitated by a licensed clinician and/or a peer. Facilitators bring topics for conversation and participants leave with more information and friendships with other new mothers.

Individual Psychotherapy: One-on-one therapy with a psychologist, clinical social worker or therapists is a safe place to share all your feelings and thoughts about new motherhood.

Medication: Some new mothers require medication to manage their depression and/or anxiety and feel like themselves again.

There is not one right way. Each mother has her own unique needs and circumstances. Some mothers may need all of help listed; others just a derivative of one. Ask your healthcare professional what treatment options are available and you can decide together what steps you should take. Or, call Postpartum Support International’s Warmline: 1.800.944.4773.

Remember - Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

**When is postpartum mental health considered an emergency?**

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**Remember**

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**Stress**

**What is stress?**

Stress is usually perceived as something negative, but it comes in many levels. Some types of stress can be good for you, and some types of stress can be bad for you. It’s important to know how to tell the difference between the two.

Good stress is the kind of stress that helps to motivate and engage you to do things. It is short-term and you usually feel in control of the situation and the outcome.

Too much stress, or bad stress, can be both short-term and long-term, and brings a feeling of helplessness or overwhelm. It triggers both your mind and body into a state of emergency, which can become chronic.

**How do you know if you experiencing too much stress?**

People experience stress symptoms differently, but some signs are common. Look through this list of stress symptoms and see if you are experiencing any of them:

- Headaches

- Difficulty sleeping

- Upset stomach or nausea

- Stiff neck or tension

- Heart Palpitations

- Low energy

- Avoiding others

- Becoming irritable

- Hearing others comment, “ You aren’t yourself”

- Unable to “turn off” worries

- Difficulty concentration

- Not eating enough, or eating too much

- Lack of appetite

- Feeling overwhelmed

- Crying easily

- Quick to anger

- Difficulty relaxing

- Not enjoying things you used to enjoy

**Managing Stress**

Although stress is an inevitable part of life, it is possible to learn ways to help you cope with it more effectively. By developing certain skills, you can feel more resilient when you are faced with stressful situations. This will help you feel stronger and calmer, and that can help your baby and whole family.

**Resilience**

Resilience is our ability to “bounce back” from stress and other difficult experiences. Being resilient doesn’t mean that you don’t feel the impact of stress. Resilience is our ability to find ways to adapt and cope to stress. We are all capable of resilience and of growing our resilience.

**Important factors for building resilience include:**

- Supportive relationships

- Realistic expectations

- Focus on developing positive and accepting attitudes toward oneself

- Focus on using communication skills even when it’s hard

- Practicing one’s tolerance of difficult feelings and thereby decreasing overwhelm

**Supportive Relationships**

It takes a village to raise a mother. It is important to think about who might be there for you, in different types of situations. All people, especially new parents, need support. Support can be provided through physical acts, such as making dinner, cleaning the house or watching the baby while you sleep. It can also be provided through emotional support. Who is the person that you call first when you have a bad day? Who listens to you and lets you vent when you’re frustrated?

*Activity: Write down your who is in your Circle of Support. Who will you call with what requests?*

**Realistic Expectations**

Where do you get your ideas about motherhood? Do they come from your family, friends, culture, religion, the media? Whatever your expectations are, remember the following:

* **The path to motherhood is hard.**
* **You will make mistakes.**
* **You won’t do it better than everyone else.**
* **You will have fantastic days and you will have horrible days.**
* **You will not have all of the answers and neither will your friends.**
* **The amount of time you think you will need will almost always be wrong**
* **You are not alone in this.**
* **You are a rockstar!**

*Activity: Would you expect of somebody else what you expect of yourself? Practice self-compassion. What did you do well today? Celebrate small victories. Ask for and accept help. That can be a small victory. Take a break when you need.*

**Positive Attitudes Towards Oneself – Soothing Activities**

Finding activities that bring you pleasure and carving out even just a little time for them can go a long way. Even though they might seem like small things, they can make a big difference for a new parent. Here are some activities that many pregnant and new moms find soothing. Do any of them work for you? Are there others not listed you could add?

* Singing
* Reading a book
* Watching a movie
* Gardening or planting a seed
* Turning on music and dancing
* Asking or accepting help from others
* Praying
* Meditating
* Writing in a journal
* Hanging out with a friend
* Going for a walk
* Taking a nap
* Preparing and eating a tasty and nutritious meal
* Moving
* Exercising
* Deep breathing
* Calling a friend
* Talking through the way you are feeling with someone who listens well
* Doing something nice for someone
* Making a cup of tea
* Taking a bath
* Knitting
* Doing crafts

**Communications Skills**

Whether you are trying to conceive, pregnant or postpartum, it is vitally important to communicate your wants and needs to your loved ones. Here are some tools you can use:

I Statements – This communication technique allows the speaker to focus on his/her own feelings or beliefs instead of thoughts and characteristics that the speaker attributes to the listener. For example, a person might say to his or her partner, “I feel lonely when you stay at work late” instead of demanding, “Why are you never home on time?”

Mirroring – This communication technique allows both people to confirm that they have been heard. For example, “What I hear you saying is that you are putting in overtime because you are concerned about the added expenses that the baby is going to have. Did I get that right? What did I miss? Is there anything else?”

**Practicing one’s tolerance of difficult feelings – Tunnels & Bridges**

Many people prefer to pretend that their difficult or painful feelings don’t exist and judge, resist and ignore them. But unless we address them, they will not go away. One tool for increasing your tolerance of these difficult feelings it to think about them as if they were an underground tunnel. There is no way out except through. So sit with your feelings. Allow yourself to feel angry and sad. Cry it out. Yell. Do what you need to do to get through them.

If the feelings don’t go away, then reach out for help. Most importantly, trust your instinct.

**Mindfulness Exercises**

If you are stressed, it can feel difficult to enjoy your life in the present. Try these calming exercises and check the ones that are helpful to you.

**Tuning Into Your 5 Senses**

Sit in a comfortable upright position with your feet planted on the ground. Rest your hands on your legs. Notice your breath, however you are breathing. Then, begin to bring awareness to each of your 5 senses, one at a time. Notice how each sense is being activated in that moment. It doesn’t matter which order you go.

- Begin to notice all of the sounds around you.

*Are you now hearing more than you were before you started? You may begin to notice subtle sounds you did not hear before.*

- Notice the smells of your environment.

*Maybe you can smell food, plants, or other things.*

- Observe your surrounding and notice colors, shapes and textures.

*You may notice things that have gone unnoticed.*

- Notice what you can taste, even if you don’t have food in your mouth.

*You may notice an aftertaste of a previous drink or meal. You can run your tongue over your teeth and cheeks to help you become more aware.*

- Bring your attention to the sensation of your skin. Feel how it is in contact with the chair and your clothing.

*Notice the temperature.*

- When you are done, take a moment to notice what you are feeling in your body.

*Compare it to how you felt before. Notice what has changed.*

**Calming Breath**

When you are very stressed or anxious, your breathing changes and becomes shallow and quick. This, in turn, can make you more stressed. Slowing down and deepening your breathing is a powerful way to bring peace to your mind and body. It may take some practice, but it is worth the effort. You don’t have to wait until you notice you are stressed to try it. You might even try it for a couple of minutes twice a day. This is a technique to slow down your breath when you are feeling stressed.

**Mindful Moments**

You don’t have to make a special time to be calmly present with your mind and body. You can tune into the present whatever you are doing- walking sitting, eating, cooking. All you need to do is bring your awareness to the present moment.

**Breath Meditation**

Just bringing your awareness to your breath can be calming. As you breathe in, become aware of your inhale, and as you breath out become aware of your exhale. Naturally your attention will wander. When you notice that, just gently bring it back to your breath, as often as needed.

Use this image below to practice rhythmic breathing.

![Breathing GIF](//images.contentful.com/8424r22246og/5UiYMqPWjmaMcewuu86628/b899b60ae01c1d4bec28b901571a74a7/circle-gif-2.gif)

Photo: Tumblr

**Identifying Automatic Negative Thoughts and Turning Them Around**

It’s not uncommon for expectant and new moms to find themselves having a lot of negative emotions. Upset or down moods can be the result of negative thought patterns. It may be helpful to identify some of the ways you might be contributing to those states of mind.

Do any of these negative thinking patterns sound familiar to you?

- Discounting the good things in your life

- Black and white thinking

- “Should” thinking

- “What if” thinking

When you feel upset or stressed or notice negative thinking, it can be helpful to try and figure out if there is something you can change to soothe yourself in the moment. HALT is a tool to help with this. Ask yourself: Am I Hungry, Angry, feeling Lonely or Tired (HALT) right now? \*

**Affirmations**

An effective way to turn negative thoughts around, manage stress and practice mindfulness is to have positive affirmations to tell yourself. Here is a list of examples that you can try:

- I don’t have to compare myself to other parents

- I am doing the best I can

- When I take care of myself, I am being a good parent

- I deserve support and help

- I can build my resilience

- I am not alone

- I do not have to be a perfect mother

- I am good enough

**The Role of Partners**

Partners and loved ones may notice changes before you do. Sometimes you may be so busy trying to manage your daily life or care for your baby that you may not be aware of how your mood has changed. Those who know you best may notice. While you are the expert on yourself, listening to the concerns of loved ones can help alert you to changes you might have overlooked or avoided talking about.

**The Impact on Partners**

Loved ones are impacted by your emotions. Recent research suggests that when one new parent is experiencing untreated depression, the other parent is more likely to become depressed or anxious later. This means that you should not suffer alone – it’s important for the entire family that you get the help and support you need.

**Ways to Support Each Other as New Parents**

It can be hard to find energy to support each other as new, expectant and future parents. But even small gestures of support make a big difference as you are adjusting to parenthood together.

- Pick a good time to ask about each other’s feelings (when baby is sleeping or not distracting your conversation)

- Acknowledge both of your efforts and challenges of trying to conceive, pregnancy and parenthood

- When having a challenging conversation, focus on something positive you admire or notice about your partner – beginning conversations with a positive focus can make it more productive and safer for both participants

- Let your partner know you are available to listen and interested in how they are doing and let them know how you are doing too

- Share when you notice positive things about your partner

- Listen carefully, and if you think they might be experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety, support them in finding help

Care Plan

1. Signs that I am experiencing stress:

Headaches

Difficulty sleeping

Upset stomach or nausea

Stiff neck or tension

Heart palpitations

Low energy

Avoiding others

Becoming irritable

Often hearing others comment “you aren’t yourself”

Unable to “turn off worries”

Difficulty concentrating

Not eating enough, or eating too much

Lack of appetite

Feeling constantly overwhelmed

Crying easily

Quick to anger

Difficulty relaxing

Not enjoying the things I used to enjoy

Negative thinking

Other

1. Soothing Activities Checklist

Singing

Reading a book

Watching a movie

Gardening or planting a seed

Turning on music and dancing

Asking or accepting help from others

Praying

Meditating

Writing in a journal

Hanging out with a friend

Going for a walk

Taking a nap

Preparing and eating a tasty and nutritious meal

Moving

Exercising

Deep breathing

Calling a friend

Talking through the way you are feeling with someone who listens well

Doing something nice for someone

Making a cup of tea

Taking a bath

Knitting

Doing crafts

1. My Circle of Support

Who can I turn to for

Talking about my feelings.

Help with babysitting.

Bringing a meal or snack.

Immediate support, like a phone call.

1. Mindfulness Exercises that Help Me Relax and Feel More Present

Tuning Into Your 5 Senses

Mindful Moments

Breath Meditation

Calming Breath

Identifying Automatic Negative Thoughts and Turning Them Around

Using HALT (Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired)

Affirmations