

Matrescence: How Motherhood Changes the Mind and Body [B1]

Un nuovo movimento invita a riconoscere la transizione alla genitorialità, caratterizzata dai cambiamenti fisici, psicologici ed emotivi che donne e uomini sperimentano durante questa fase della vita, denominata ‘matrescenza’ nel caso delle donne.



We all know that adolescence is a difficult phase of life, when our hormones fluctuate, our bodies change and we form a new sense of identity. But what about new [parenthood](#)? The term ‘matrescence’ was [coined](#) in the 1970s by medical anthropologist Dana Raphael and it refers to the developmental phase of new [motherhood](#). Just like adolescence, matrescence is a phase when women go through intense physical, psychological and emotional changes. More recent research shows that the brains of new fathers experience similar changes.

A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

While adolescence has been widely studied and discussed for decades, new [parenthood](#) is only now getting the attention it [deserves](#) in the medical community and society. This is thanks to a global movement that recognises it as an equally difficult and important phase of life. The movement has resulted in an increased number of support groups and other [resources](#) for new mothers to help women and men transition into [parenthood](#).

TOTALLY NORMAL

Society often presents [pregnancy](#) and early [parenthood](#) as a glorious phase of life. However, up to 20 per cent of women suffer from postpartum depression, and many others from anxiety, psychosis and other mental health problems during early [parenthood](#) in particular. Experts say it’s important [to raise awareness](#) of how common this is, so that women and men don’t feel [isolated](#) or afraid to express openly how they feel and get the help that they need.

CHANGES IN THE BRAIN

Women’s bodies change radically during [pregnancy](#). Naturally, they are psychologically impacted by these physical changes and by the hormonal fluctuations that occur during the development of the foetus. In 2016, a scientific study by researchers at the Autonomous University of Barcelona discovered that women’s brains also change during [pregnancy](#) and that these changes are still present two years after giving birth.

MATERNAL BONDS

The researchers did brain scans on [first-time mothers](#) before and after [pregnancy](#). They found that [pregnancy](#) alters the size and structure of regions of the brain involved in understanding the thoughts, feelings, [beliefs](#) and intentions of others. Two years after giving birth, the changes were so evident that a computer algorithm could use them to identify which women had been pregnant and which

had not... However, a growing body of research is observing this type of plasticity in first-time fathers, too. They also experience the cognitive, physical and emotional demands of caring for a [newborn](#).

Glossary

- **coined** = coniare
- **deserves** = meritare
- **to raise awareness** = aumentare la consapevolezza
- **isolated** = isolate
- **first-time mothers** = madri alla prima esperienza
- **beliefs** = credenze
- **newborn** = neonato
- **parenthood** = genitorialità
- **motherhood** = maternità
- **resources** = risorse
- **pregnancy** = gravidanza