Keeping well

DURING PREGNANCY AND BEYOND

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WELCOME

Having a baby can be a joyful experience, but it brings physical, emotional, psychological and social changes and at times can also be stressful and overwhelming. Learning new skills in managing daily stresses as well as those that come with pregnancy and a new baby can help with coping. Taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of your baby.

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Addiction & Mental Health Services
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Queensland Government

In this booklet

If you have a new baby, a toddler, or young children, then this booklet is for you.

Whether you're a first-time mum or a mum with years of experience this booklet aims to give you practical tips for health and wellbeing and up-to-date information. It also has strategies to help with stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Give the tips in this booklet a try but there is no need to try every strategy. Some of the tips in this booklet will work better for you than others, because everyone is different. Please revisit this booklet as some of the information may become more relevant as your baby grows and you progress through the stages of motherhood.

While the book focuses on women in pregnancy and the postnatal period, we hope it is a helpful resource for partners and other family members as the skills and strategies can be used by anyone. If you are feeling stressed, worried or anxious it is important to talk to someone. Each year, many women in Australia are affected by depression and or anxiety during pregnancy or following childbirth. If you are concerned about this, please speak to your GP as support is available.

You may also be interested in our other booklets on these conditions. Our booklets: *Antenatal and Postnatal Depression* and *Antenatal and Postnatal Anxiety* aim to provide brief, easy-to-read introduction to these conditions and have been designed for women as well as their partners, families and friends. We hope that these booklets provide a better understanding of depression and or anxiety and encourage those affected to seek help early, and consequently contribute their recovery.

For urgent assistance

Telephone: 000 for life threatening situations
Lifeline: ph. 131114
MH CALL – ph. 1300 64 22 55. MH Call is a tele-triage service that delivers a single point of access to mental health services in Queensland. The number will connect you to your local mental health service and help with faster and accurate access to specialist mental health services.
PANDA: (Perinatal and Anxiety Depression Australia) ph. 1300 726 306

Online resources:

www.panda.org.au
www.cope.org.au
www.beyondblue.org.au
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
www.1800respect.org.au
www.raisingchildren.net.au
www.mumspace.com.au

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Lifestyle and Self-Care

Healthy lifestyle activities and self-care help with good health and wellbeing [1]

- Establish a relationship with a regular GP and other health professionals for antenatal and postnatal care needs
- If you have a history of, or current, mental health concerns seek out extra health professional support, as pregnancy and the first-year post birth are higher risk times for common disorders such as depression and anxiety as well as other mental illnesses
- Eat a healthy and varied diet (more information on next page)
- Alcohol is not recommended in pregnancy
- It is safer not to drink alcohol at all when breastfeeding as alcohol passes into breastmilk and can affect feeding and baby's sleep
- Avoid, or limit caffeine or consider decaffeinated options for tea, coffee and coke
- Try to rest where possible
- Practice good sleep strategies (see over)
- Regular appropriate exercise such as walking can aid health and wellbeing reduce tension, stress and anxiety and is known to help with depression and motivation
- Look at your current support network and try to increase supports. This may be through social connections at local community groups, mum's groups, playgroups or via online groups

Eating Well

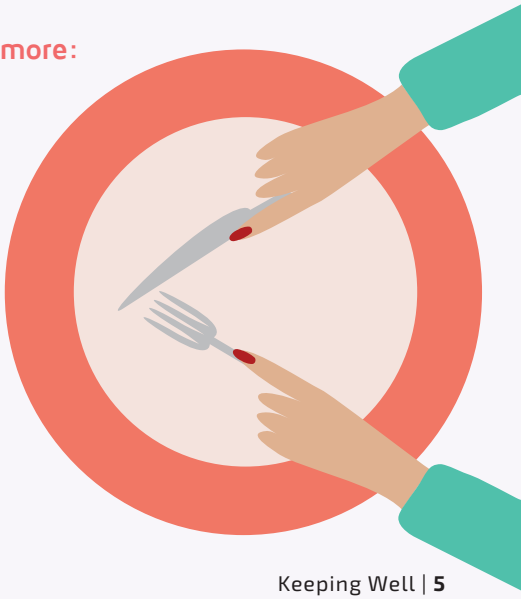
A healthy diet is important for everyone at every stage of life [2], but it is especially important for women before, during and after pregnancy. Most adults and children do not eat sufficient amounts of fruit and vegetables. A balanced and nutritious diet has benefits for both you and your baby. It will give you more energy to look after yourself and your family, and to do the things you enjoy. In the long-term, a healthy diet can also lower your risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and many types of cancer [3,4].

Making healthy choices

Mums are often tired, busy, and sleep-deprived. It can be difficult to prepare and eat healthy meals when you are pushed for time or feeling tired, making fast foods a tempting choice. These foods are energy-dense and nutrient-poor. They lack fibre and are often high in saturated fat, refined sugars, and salt. A balanced and healthy diet includes vegetables, fruits, proteins, healthy fats, and wholegrain cereals. To ensure your body receives proper nourishment, it is important to learn which foods are good for you, and which foods should be consumed in moderation [5, 6].

It is recommended that women eat more:

- Fruits;
- Vegetables and legumes/beans;
- Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs;
- Nuts, seeds, and tofu;
- Whole grain (cereal) foods (preferably high fibre varieties);
- Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives (preferably low or reduced fat varieties);



Women should try to limit or cut down on:

- Refined grain and cereal foods, such as white bread and low-fibre cereals;
- Full-fat or medium-fat milk, yoghurt, and cheese;
- Nutrient-poor and energy-dense fast foods and drinks, such as takeaway-foods, sugar-sweetened juices and fizzy drinks, fried foods, hot chips, pies and pastries, processed meats, cakes and biscuits, chips, chocolate, and lollies.

Tips for increasing your vegetable and fruit intake:

- While grocery shopping, look for different colours and varieties of fruits and vegetables.
- Make vegetables the main portion of your meal - they should take up half to two-thirds of the plate.
- Experiment with different ways of cooking and presenting vegetables to make them look, smell and taste better.
- Plan your meals in advance to help increase your daily fruit and vegetable intake. Create a weekly meal plan that includes vegetables. Try adding easy to prep vegetables such as zucchini, carrots, peas or spinach to pasta sauces, soups and other dishes.
- Prepare salads with a low-fat dressing.
- Pre-pack healthy snacks of fruit, nuts or vegetable sticks to eat while busy or on the go.

Eating well as a family

- Cooking meals together is a great way for the family to learn about healthy food choices, spend time together and pass on family/cultural traditions.
- Occasionally eating at a different time to your children is also okay. It is okay to let your partner cook for you, so you can spend time with your kids or even have some alone time.
- Stocking your pantry with a variety of healthy basics can simplify your meal planning and preparation and reduce the temptation for take away foods.

Exercise in Pregnancy

Engaging in regular physical activity or exercise is important for your physical and mental health and well-being. Pregnant women should engage in regular exercise unless they have a medical or obstetric complication advising against this (speak to your antenatal care provider if you are unsure) [7, 8].

Exercise has a wide range of benefits such as helping with cardiovascular fitness, reducing the risk of gestational diabetes, obesity, and pregnancy induced hypertension and pre-eclampsia [9].

Exercise can help reduce back ache, pelvic pain, fatigue and constipation and helps with physical recovery from labour and birth. It can also reduce anxiety, improve your mood and enhance self-esteem. Exercising with others can make it more enjoyable, reduce loneliness and provide you with greater social support.

The body changes in a range of ways in pregnancy including releasing a hormone called relaxin that softens the ligaments in preparation for birth. These changes can increase the risk of joint injury so stretching should be performed slowly and with control to avoid injury.

You may also feel more breathless and the body core temperature rises so taking care not to overheat is important. In later pregnancy it can be harder to maintain your balance. It is also important not to perform exercise while lying flat on your back after 16 weeks.

Some tips about exercising

- Physical activity needs to be regular, not hard, for you to benefit. Start with light exercise and build on that.
- Walking is a good form of exercise. If you enjoy light exercise and socialising with others, join a walking group in your area, or form your own group with friends and family.
- Exercise performed in water (e.g. aqua aerobics, water-walking or gentle swimming) is a great way to work out without placing too much stress on the body.
- Join your local gym or community centre for group exercise classes (e.g. Zumba or Tai Chi). These classes can be a fun way to increase your daily physical activity and meet new people.
- Drink plenty of water during and after exercise
- Seek advice if unsure about the type of exercise you want to do in pregnancy.
- Stop exercising if you experience pain or bleeding
- During pregnancy, avoid high impact exercises, traditional abdominal exercises, heavy lifting and exercises which require you to lie on your back.
- Remember to ensure adequate nutrition and hydration (especially if breastfeeding)

After having a baby

Changes that have occurred in the body during pregnancy can take up to 6 weeks to reverse but some changes can take up to six months to a year. Incorrectly exercising can cause pain and may aggravate body changes. Listen to your body and avoid exercises that cause any discomfort.

It is important to talk to your doctor and be medically cleared before resuming exercise after having a baby. If you have had specific difficulties related to the birth you may want to seek advice from a physiotherapist or accredited exercise physiologist.

Some women may have problems with urine incontinence after the birth of a baby. Learning how to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles may help. Talk to your GP or midwife if this concerns you as helpful treatments are available.

Healthy Sleep Strategies

Good sleep is important for general health and wellbeing [10.]

Sleep is commonly disrupted in pregnancy or postnatally. This may relate to discomfort or body changes in pregnancy or from being woken by your baby so learning how to sleep well is important for health and wellbeing. Tension, anxiety or depression can impair healthy sleep. Sleep problems can also worsen symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Sleeping tips:

- Establish a regular time for going to sleep and waking up
- If possible avoid napping during the day
- Follow a bed time routine for you (and your baby) with rituals such as changing into pyjamas, brushing your teeth, doing relaxing breathing exercises or stretches
- A warm bath or shower can help your body relax and be ready to sleep
- Keep the bed for sleeping and not for watching TV or using phones or devices
- Stop looking at screens (e.g. phone, computer, TV) at least an hour before bed
- Make the environment helpful for sleeping – soft lighting or full darkened room, comfortable bedding and temperature.
- Avoid caffeine (such as coffee, tea, soft drinks) and nicotine (cigarettes) for at least 4-6 hours before bed time as they can keep you awake.
- Regular daytime exercise can help enhance sleep but try to avoid during late afternoon or night as this may energise your body
- Limit or avoid alcohol. Alcohol in the evening can disrupt sleep patterns and negatively affect your mental and physical health.
- Speak with your family/partner about taking turns to feed or change the baby so you can get more sleep.
- If you can't sleep after 20 minutes get up and if possible, go to another room and sit quietly in dim lighting until you feel sleepy or read something and then try to sleep again.

Free downloadable apps to help with your sleep

Relax Melodies (www.relaxmelodies.com)
YouTube "The Honest Guys - Guided Meditation for Sleep"

Healthy Breathing

Poor breathing habits, where breathing is shallow and rapid, can contribute to stress, muscle tension, headaches, low energy, anxiety and depression. Learning to breathe from the abdomen and using the diaphragm can help to relieve stress and anxiety, reduce tension and improve your mood.

Even practising 5 healthy breaths twice a day helps with health and wellbeing.

You may want to practise one of the following exercises.

Diaphragmatic Breathing [11:]

Shallow breathing using the upper chest is a typical response to stress and anxiety. By making a conscious effort to use the diaphragm to breathe (diaphragmatic or abdominal breathing), you can reduce the symptoms of anxiety and stress, and encourage your body to relax [12]

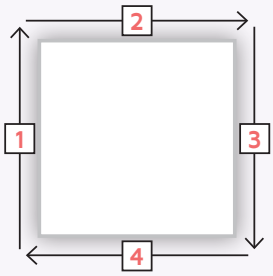
- Sit or lie (don't lie flat if you are pregnant) in a quiet, relaxed, and comfortable environment
- Place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen. Observe which hand rises as you breathe in. If your chest is rising first, it means your breathing is too shallow. This can often increase symptoms of anxiety and stress. A healthier alternative is deep, diaphragmatic breathing.
- Deep diaphragmatic breathing doesn't mean breathing in lots of air. It refers to taking deep breaths into your diaphragm, a dome-shaped muscle which sits below your lungs.
- Practice breathing deeply in and out of your nose. As you breathe, the chest wall should be still, and the abdomen should be moving.
- Practice deep diaphragmatic breathing daily until you can raise your stomach consistently on in-breath.
- Gradually slow down each exhale of your breath.

Square Breathing [11]

Square breathing involves imagining moving around the outside of a square with your breathing

- Breathe in for 4 seconds
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds
- Breathe out for 4 seconds
- Rest for 4 seconds

Repeat this process as many times as necessary.



Relaxation

Relaxation practice helps promote feelings of comfort and calm while decreasing feelings of stress and anxiety. Relaxation helps the muscles relax, makes your mind clear and tranquil and slows the breathing and heart rate [13]. Two simple relaxation activities are below. Relaxation may feel strange and unnatural when you first start but will become easier and more effective with practise. Use your healthy breathing technique during these relaxation activities.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation [13]

- Sit or lie comfortably in a quiet environment
- Starting at your feet, tense your toes and stretch your feet
- Work your way up the body and tense different muscles.
- Keep muscles tensed for at least 10 counts – but never tense muscles so tight or for too long that it hurts
- Slowly release the tension and allow the muscles to relax
- Pay attention to your body and allow the feeling of relaxation to flow through your body.

Creative or Guided Visualisation [13]

This involves visualising a scene, situation, or place which you find safe and relaxing, and which makes you happy

- Sit or lie down in a quiet and comfortable place
- Close your eyes and gently breathe through your nose. Pay attention to your breathing.
- In your mind, picture a place or situation that you find pleasant and relaxing (for instance, a beach or a park).
- Listen to the sounds, notice the colours, imagine smelling the aromas and tasting the air in this place. Look around the place or situation and pay attention to how you and your body feels
- Continue for at least 10 minutes and until you feel relaxed.

Many women enjoy yoga, another form of relaxation and it is suitable for any age and fitness level, can be enjoyed from your own home or in a group class. Meditation is another form of relaxation. It is the practise of focusing your mind, and letting any thoughts just pass by as you focus your attention on breathing or a mantra. If you have difficulty with meditating on your own, consider downloading one of the apps below for guided meditation exercises [13].

Free downloadable apps for relaxation and guided meditation:

Breath App www.au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps/reachout-breathe
You Tube "The Honest Guys - Guided Meditation"

Mindfulness

Do you ever notice that when you do a repetitive task such as driving, your mind sometimes wanders miles away? This is often referred to as auto pilot. Mindfulness is the opposite of auto pilot. Mindfulness requires us to be completely in the present moment, to be aware of what is happening to and around us and accepting things as they are.

Mindfulness is a skill that takes time to develop [14]. Mindfulness can be learnt in many ways [15]. Meditation is one of the key techniques used in mindfulness training and many apps are well researched and free, but this is not the only technique.

Mindfulness has many health benefits. It can help you to reduce worrying thoughts and anxiety, relax the mind and create a sense of calm and improve focus and productivity. Mindfulness can be used in everyday life, but it requires some practice.

You can be mindful during meditation or in your everyday activities [14, 15].

Core Features of Mindfulness [15, 16]

- **Observing:** observe your experience by paying attention to your senses. Observe thoughts feelings and bodily sensations with a kind and gentle curiosity.
- **Describing:** notice the fine details of what you are seeing or experiencing. Eg. Sad emotions may feel heavy, anxiety may make you feel tense.
- **Participate Fully:** allow yourself to consider the whole experience without excluding anything. Do this with care and attention.
- **Being non-judgmental:** do not think of things as being right or wrong, good or bad. Prolonged emotional distress is often related to attempts to avoid or control an experience. When being mindful no attempt is made to evaluate the experience.
- **Focus on one thing at a time:** the art of being present is to notice when your thoughts have drifted away and to bring them back to observing and sensing mode.

Mindfulness Exercises[16]

Here are two simple exercises to help you incorporate mindfulness into your daily routine:

Mindful Walking: while walking bring attention to the feel of the ground under your feet, notice your breath, notice the feeling of the sun on your skin, look at your surroundings notice the sights, smells and sounds around you. Look at the sky, look at the trees. Enjoy the moment.

One Minute Associated Breathing Exercise: sit in a quiet and comfortable environment. Focus your entire attention only on your breathing and nothing else for the minute. Pay attention to each breath you take in and out and notice where you feel your breath enter and exit your body. If your mind wonders bring it gently back to your breath. This is a good technique to bring you back to the present and make you feel calm when you are feeling distressed.

Free downloadable apps to help you practice mindfulness:

Smiling Mind (www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app)
Stop, Breathe & Think (www.stopbreathethink.com)
Mind the Bump www.mindthebump.org.au/

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is an important source of happiness. It requires us to be gentle, understanding and supportive, and offering unconditional love and support to oneself in times of distress instead of self-criticism and judgement. Practicing self-compassion can lead to higher levels of well-being and reduce suffering [17].

Tips for practicing self-compassion:

- Remember that nobody is perfect, nor do they have a perfect life. Life is full of twists and turns for everyone. Remind yourself that it is a normal human experience to make mistakes and to experience pain when life is difficult or challenging. Let go of the need to be a 'perfect mum' and allow yourself to go with the flow.
- Be aware of your thoughts about yourself. If you find you are comparing yourself to others or judging your own thoughts/action, you can choose to respond with compassion. Say (or think) something like "it's okay to feel down, but you are trying your best". By doing this, you practice kindness and forgiveness towards yourself, and give yourself permission to accept yourself and your situation.
- Treat yourself as you would your best friend.
- Think of a compassionate and caring person you know – How would they support you in this moment? Imagine what their voice would sound like and what they would say if they were with you right now.
- Connect with others – it is highly possible that you are not the only one who is feeling this way!
- Most importantly – be kind to yourself

Practicing these tips is a great way to lift feelings of inadequacy and feeling overwhelmed

Journaling

Journaling involves keeping a journal that explores your thoughts and feelings about events in your life [17]. Journaling is a great tool that can help you to offload your feelings, problem solve and set goals. Journaling has been shown to improve mood and reduce anxiety [17]. There are many ways to journal, here are some ideas.

- Write in detail about feelings and thoughts related to a stressful event
- Brainstorm possible solutions to a problem that you have
- If you have a lot of anger or pain, write it out and let it go
- If you are frustrated with aspects of your life, write down what is frustrating and look at what may help to change that
- If you often complain about things, write about why these things upset you
- Set goals – aim for some short term and some longer-term goals
- Gratitude – write down what you are thankful for in your life
- Achievements – write down what you have achieved each day. These may be as small or large as you like

Unsendable letters

Journaling can let you speak your mind and heart to another person without holding back. You can write an unsendable letter to anyone that you have unresolved issues with e.g., a loved one who has passed and who you miss or a letter to your ex-partner with unresolved issues.

Unsendable letters are also great way to release your anger when you feel you have been wronged. e.g. that car that cut you off this morning or your grumpy rude customer you served last night.

Write a letter, letting go of all those angry feelings. You can write out exactly what you would want to say, no matter how inappropriate. The process is about letting go of the angry feelings. You may want to write these letters on a separate piece of paper so that you can shred it and watch those angry feelings being taken away.

Gratitude

Gratitude is when we can appreciate what we have instead of always seeking out something we don't have in the hope that it will make us happier. When we feel gratitude, we experience more positive emotions, we take greater joy in good experiences, build stronger relationships with others, become more resilient, and improve our health. Evidence shows an increase in happiness when we focus on gratitude [18, 19].

With daily practice, gratefulness becomes a way of life and can greatly improve our outlook on life.

You can practice being more thankful in your mind or if you like journaling, it is always nice to end your journal entry on a positive note.

This simple exercise practiced daily can help improve happiness and well-being.

The Three Good Things Exercise [18, 19]:

1. Think of three good things that happened to you on that day
2. Write down these three positive things in a journal
3. Reflect on why they happened to you

You can write about anything that happened to you that day that you feel is good or positive for you, no matter how mundane it is. After writing them down, reflecting on why each good thing happened to you is an important step and an effective way to practice self-compassion.

Goal Setting

Setting goals, big or small, is a great way to give yourself direction, improve your focus and decision-making skills. It also helps improve motivation and a sense of achievement which can in turn improve your mood and sense of happiness [20]. Goals don't need to be big to be meaningful. Big, small or random – goals can be anything you want to achieve [20].

Defining your goal using the **SMART** method can help you improve your goal setting [21]:

S – specific goal

M – measurable – how will you know you have achieved your goal?

A – achievable

R – realistic

T – time frame – short, medium- or long-term goals. When do you want to achieve your goal?

Other tips

- Talking to your partner or family about your goals can help keep you on track towards achieving them.
- If you have a big goal or simply feel overwhelmed, consider breaking up your goal into smaller parts.
- Write them down and tick them off as you achieve them. This a great way to visualise your progress and stay motivated.
- Don't forget to reward yourself as you achieve your goals!

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

Our brain generates hundreds and thousands of thoughts every day. Some thoughts are very useful to us, but others can be unhelpful and contribute to feeling stressed, anxious or depressed.

By understanding common unhelpful thinking patterns and taking a step back and seeing thoughts for what they are –thoughts – it becomes easier to disengage from troubling thoughts and get back on track.

Common unhelpful thinking patterns include [22:]

- **Jumping to conclusions** is when we assume what someone is thinking (mind reading), or when we make predictions about what may happen in the future
- **Shoulds or Musts** is when we focus on how things "should" or "must" happen. With this style of thinking, we often beat ourselves up with thoughts of how we "should have" handled a situation better or how something "must" happen a certain way rather than accepting how things really are. This can cause us to place extra pressure on ourselves or our loved ones to do things in a 'particular way'.
- **Overgeneralising** is when we take one negative experience from the past or present and assign it to other future or past experiences (e.g. "you always…" or "I never…").
- **Labelling and mislabelling.** This is extreme overgeneralization. Instead of accepting your error you label yourself or others with negative words. I'm a 'loser' she is a 'horrible person'. Mislabelling often involves language that is emotionally loaded.
- **Catastrophising** refers to "blowing things out of proportion". In this type of thinking, we tend to view a situation or outcome as the worst or most horrible thing in the world, even though in reality the problem may not be that bad.
- **Black and white thinking** is when we perceive things or situations to be all good or all bad, right or wrong. In this form of unhelpful thinking, there is no grey area in between and we tend to see only one extreme or the other.
- **Mental Filter** Focusing on only one negative part of the situation and ignoring the rest. Like a drop of ink discolouring the whole glass of water
- **Magnification and minimisation** refers to the tendency to magnify the positive attributes in other people whilst minimising our own positive attributes. This can lead to low self-esteem and low confidence and cause us to feel worse.

- **Personalisation** This is when you blame yourself for what goes wrong even when you are only partially responsible or not responsible at all
- **Emotional reasoning** This involves basing your view of situations on the way you are feeling. E.g. the only evidence that you have that something bad is going to happen is just a feeling that something bad will happen. You assume your negative feelings reflect the way things really are.

Challenging Unhelpful Thinking Styles:

You can become more aware of your thoughts and how to challenge or change them.

Try the exercise below to learn how to do this.

Catch it, check it, change it [23]:

- **Catch it:** Spot when you are having a troubling thought or unpleasant emotion, first stop what you are doing,
  - Take 3 deep breaths or count to 10.
  - What am I thinking?
  - Describe and define the problem (like a statement)
  - What am I reacting to?
  - Notice sensations in your body
- **Check it:** is this helpful or getting me anywhere?
  - Is it 100% true?
  - Where is the evidence?
  - What would I tell a friend?
  - What would a trusted friend say to me right now?
  - Does it make sense? Is it realistic?
  - Can I change it? Is it within or beyond my control?
  - What is the worst that could happen?
  - Will it matter in 5 or 10 years from now?
- **Change it:** Figure out a strategy for dealing with this emotion or thought in a safe and effective way.
  - At this point, you can choose to solve it or simply let it go and move past it.
  - What is the best thing for me to do?
  - Which answer made the most sense?
  - How can I put this into practice?
  - Do I need to look more at problem solving this? (More information on problem solving can be found in the following pages).

Healthy Relationships and Supports

Being a new parent can make you feel more connected to your partner or family. However, caring for children can also place new pressures on your relationships. Healthy relationships are important. A healthy relationship is one where both partners/ persons are honest, communicate openly, support and respect each other's wishes and feelings. It also makes you feel safe, trusted, valued, understood, listened to, supported and like an equal [24.]

Having a good support system with healthy relationships can help you cope during stressful periods in your life and helps with general health and wellbeing. Supports outside of friends and family can be helpful particularly for parents and offers a way of sharing experiences and realising you are not alone.

Some community supports include:

- Parent groups
- Play groups
- Community centres
- Local library groups for parents and children

The perinatal period can also be a stressful time for dads or partners. It is important that they also look after themselves and get support when needed.

- www.sms4dads.com
- www.howisdadgoing.org.au
- www.raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/fathers
- www.mensline.org.au
- 1300 78 99 78

Unhealthy Relationships and Domestic Violence

Unfortunately, domestic and family violence is not uncommon and sometimes people may not recognise some of its signs. Domestic and/or family violence is a pattern of negative or abusive behaviour that aims to scare, manipulate and control you. Physical violence is one form of abuse. Abuse can also be psychological, verbal, financial, social, economic or spiritual. Verbal put downs, threats, jealousy, humiliation, control or tracking your movements and social contacts, or withholding of finances are all common examples. These types of behaviours can result in low confidence or self-esteem, depression or anxiety, and other health problems for you and your children [24.]

What you should know if you are experiencing domestic of family violence:

You are not alone, and there is no excuse for any type of abuse in your personal relationships.

Abusive relationships often become more severe over time, and verbal and psychological abuse may change to physical abuse.

If you are experiencing abuse of any kind in your relationship, you can contact a range of confidential help and support services:

If you or your family are in immediate danger phone 000

Domestic Violence (DV) Connect 24/7 Queensland Hotline: 1800 811 811

The National Sexual Assault, Family & Domestic Violence Counselling Line: 1800RESPECT or 1800 737 732 or visit www.1800respect.org.au.

If you require an interpreter phone: 13 14 50 and ask them to contact 1800 RESPECT

If you have a hearing or speech impairment:

- **Voice Calls:** call 133 677 and ask them to contact 1800 RESPECT
- **Speak and Listen:** call 1300 555 727 and ask them to contact 1800 RESPECT
- **Daisy App** www.1800respect.org.au/daisy

A list of domestic violence services in Queensland is available at: www.qlddomesticviolencelink.org.au

Family and Child Connect: 13 32 64 also provide a range of supports including support around domestic and family violence

Effective Communication

Talking to your partner, family or friends can help your health and strengthen your long-term relationships [25]. Positive and constructive communication helps express your needs, build understanding and sort out disagreements. What you say to each other and how you say it (body language) can have a big impact on how your partner or family perceives what you are saying and how they respond [25].

Positive, constructive and effective communication starts with some simple steps [25]:

- Be positive when raising a problem to your partner or family. For instance, "it's wonderful when you help with dinner, I missed your help the last few days".
- Pick your moment carefully, it is better to talk to your partner or family when they are calm and relaxed.
- Be assertive which is not the same as being aggressive. Assertiveness is learned behaviour which involves being confident, respectful, honest about your needs and being an active listener when your partner speaks to you. Using "I" language can help with assertive communication. For example, "I feel upset when I don't get some help with the housework"
- Use open and relaxed body language and make eye contact when talking to the other person.
- Keep the conversation brief, focus on the issue and state it in as few words as possible. Long explanations may cause your partner to lose interest, become defensive or prevent them from understanding you.
- Do not speak for others but share your own thoughts and feelings.
- Avoid saying insulting or hurtful things which make others less likely to listen to what you are saying.
- Avoid name calling, unhelpful comparisons, bringing up the past, and statements which imply that someone is always wrong or never tries
- If you and your partner or loved ones are having trouble with communication, it may help to speak to someone in the family or to a trusted friend.
- You may want to consider individual or couple counselling

Problem Solving

When a problem arises, sometimes is it better to solve it than simply cope with it.

Learning how to solve problems can help reduce worrying, anxiety and unhelpful thinking [26].

To make problem solving easier, consider the following tips:

- Setting aside enough time will help you come up with the best action plan for you.
- Focus on solving one problem at a time. If there is more work to be done, simply come back to it the next day.
- Some people write down their problems and solutions on paper instead of solving everything in their head.
- Talking to a trusted friend or your partner can also make problem solving easier.

Effective problem solving involves [26]:

1. **Identifying the problem –** Is there actually a problem? Is it happening now? Do you have any control over it? If the problem is unrealistic or you have little control over it, then let it go. Clearly state the problem by writing it down or talk it out with someone to help you figure out a plan of action.
2. **Brainstorm possible solutions –** list all the possible solutions to your problem. They don't need to be perfect. This may help you find creative and useful solutions.
3. **Evaluate solutions –** weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of your preferred solutions and write a 'pros and cons' list.
4. **Choose one of the solutions** you think may be the best one to try as well as a back-up solution to try if the first doesn't work.
5. **Plan and carry out your solution –**Be specific on what needs to be done and by whom and the timing and setting.
6. **Evaluate the outcome –** reflect on how effective your solution was. Are you pleased with the outcome? If not, revisit your plan and make revisions.

Effective Time Management

As a mum, it can be easy to get distracted by unimportant tasks. Taking a few minutes each day to plan what needs to be done and to organise your schedule around that saves time. Make sure you're focused on the important things.

Some tips:

- **Invest in a planner –** a diary, calendar or even a to-do app on your phone is a great way to record daily or weekly tasks that need to be done.
- **Planning ahead –** planning ahead can help you get the most out of each day. Take a few minutes each night to plan what needs to be done the next day. Allocate time for meal preparation, cleaning and relaxation.
- **Prepare for the unexpected –** being flexible in your planning is important at times when things don't go to plan. Don't fill your entire day with tasks to do. Leave some time free in case you need to go overtime on a task.
- **Prioritise –** as you are planning your day, keep in mind which tasks are most important. Prioritising and completing the important tasks will leave you feeling more satisfied each day.
- **Delegate tasks –** if you don't have the time or energy to complete a task, don't feel guilty about outsourcing it to your partner, family members or friends.

Free time management apps for mums:

- Alarmed – Reminders + Timers: www.yoctoville.com/apps/
- Errands To-Do List: www.yoctoville.com/apps/
- Wunderlist: www.wunderlist.com

Planning Activities and Pleasant Events

As a new mum, it is easy to spend all your time on your baby. However, it is important for your health and your baby's health to take time out for yourself. Increasing your activity level (especially activities you enjoy) can give you a sense of achievement, help improve your mood and make you feel happier.

Some tips [27]:

- Think about activities you have enjoyed in the past or consider trying new interests or hobbies
- Some women find that using a weekly planner helps to organize their time and encourage motivation.
- Schedule an activity you enjoy in the morning or the afternoon each day.
- Activities can be as simple as going for a walk, grabbing a coffee with a friend or listening to music.
- Regular pram walking group – on your own or join a group
- Join a gym with child minding
- Check out activities at the local community or neighbourhood centres that both you and your baby/ infant would enjoy
- Plan a romantic candlelit dinner at home after the kids are in bed if you do not have a baby sitter.
- Plan some time for a relaxation or mindfulness activity each day

Bonding with your unborn baby

Every pregnancy experience is unique with a range of possible emotional experiences. Some women may feel an emotional connection with their unborn baby from the time they know they know they are pregnant while for others it may take a lot longer or they may struggle with positive feelings for a range or reasons. This does not mean you won't ever feel connected to your baby.

There are some ways you can feel more bonded with your unborn baby [28]:

- Talk, read or sing to your baby, tell baby what you are doing or who you imagine they may be.
- Try using a name or nickname for your unborn baby – even if it is not the name you will use when they are born.
- When your baby moves or bumps, nudges or kicks you, play with your baby, gently poking or nudging baby
- Take photos of your body to see your baby grow
- If you have scan pictures of your baby, look at them regularly
- Make a keepsake – knit, sew or crotchet something for baby, start a scrapbook or photo album, write your baby a letter, do a belly casting and paint or decorate it
- Consider keeping a pregnancy journal
- Keep track of baby's development and growth. You may want to download a pregnancy tracker
- Practice mindfulness. You can download a free app such as Mind the Bump and practice some of the exercise
- Do pregnancy yoga which helps you relax and focus on your body and your baby
- Involve your partner/friend/ or family member. When baby kicks place their hand on your tummy, so they can feel baby.
- Let go of the negative and write down all the things that will make you a good mother and what you are looking forward to sharing with your baby.

Bonding with your baby after birth

Being a new parent is an exciting time. In the first few weeks of your baby's life, it may seem like your baby is not doing much other than eating and sleeping but a lot is going on! This is also the perfect time to bond with your baby and create a feeling of trust and security.

Some tips for bonding with baby [29]:

- Cuddle your baby. Hold baby close to your chest so it can hear your heartbeat
- Try taking some deep healthy breaths while lying with baby on your chest, this will help sooth both you and baby together.
- Baby loves your voice - read a book or tell a story to your baby, use a sing-song baby like voice when talking to them, give a general commentary of what you and baby are doing during the day, sing them a song.
- Human touch is important for babies, and massage can be a great way to bond with your baby and help your baby relax. Gentle body strokes throughout the day or a gentle massage with baby massage oil after a bath can help your baby thrive.
- Delight in your baby. Smile at your baby - their face will mirror yours and your baby will love smiling back at you and waiting for you to return their smile.
- Close face to face time and eye contact with you baby is important. Sometimes your baby may turn away from you this is because their brains need a rest and time to grow.
- When your baby is awake or alert, strengthen the bond by playing with them. Try games such as "Peek-a-boo" and clapping games

Effective Parenting

Ordinary mothers (parents) are "real" people with many emotions, struggles and insecurities that they cope with to respond to their baby's needs. This provides a safe environment where babies feel they can be themselves.

There is no such thing as a perfect mother.

"Good Enough Parenting" is a concept that was introduced by Donald Winnicott.

Being "good enough" does not mean being perfect. Babies need to experience small amounts of frustrations to learn to cope in the world. Being perfect is not achievable or realistic, a "perfect mother" does not exist.

Parents only need to get their interactions with baby right 1 out of 3 times.

There will be plenty of opportunities to repair your relationship with your baby. The important thing to remember is to keep trying – this is what your baby will know and remember!

Effective way to parent your baby [30]

Your baby is born to engage with you and will respond to your interactions – they will cry when they are distressed, or they need you and will settle when comforted or appropriately responded to.

- Respond to your baby's needs in an appropriate, timely and sensitive way
- Consider "What could my baby be thinking or feeling right now?"
- Pace your response to your baby's cues – if it looks like baby has had enough play time, try some cuddles instead or if they appear interested in or excited about something turn that into exploration or playtime.
- Create an environment where you can safely play and interact with your baby
- Have a balanced between both stimulating and soothing activities and interactions

Apps and websites:

- What Were We Thinking: jeanhailes.org.au/what-were-we-thinking/discover-our-app
- Parentline: call 1300 301 300 or visit: parentline.com.au
- Raising Children: raisingchildren.net.au
- Beyond Blue: Healthy Families: healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au

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