



# COPING

WITH CHANGE:  
*a new parent's guide*



women's  
health clinic



### *Acknowledgments:*

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Special thanks to the many people – including clients, volunteers and staff of Women’s Health Clinic – who shared their knowledge and wisdom about postpartum emotional adjustments.

*\*The NURSE method was originally adapted from Women’s Moods: What Every Woman Must Know About Hormones, the Brain, and Emotional Health by Deborah Sichel & Jeanne Watson Driscoll, 1999*

*First edition: February 1990*

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# A BABY CHANGES YOUR LIFE

Whether you've given birth or adopted, a baby changes your life. For most parents of a new baby, life with baby is different than they thought.

## *Your feelings change*

You'll have many different feelings – happy, sad, unsure, anxious, angry, confused – sometimes all at once! These feelings can grow stronger when we are tired.

## *Your body changes, inside and out*

Body and hormone changes during and after pregnancy can affect moods. Some people feel happy about their birth experience; most need time to recover, both physically and emotionally.

## *Your knowledge changes*

It's common for parents of a new baby to feel unsure. There are many opinions about how to do things. Every baby is unique. You can try several different things to learn what works best for you and your baby. Be patient with yourself as you learn.

## *Your daily life changes*

You may not be able to do everything you want to in a day. There are few breaks from caring for a baby. It's normal to feel overwhelmed.

## *You change*

The challenges of parenting mean you are learning every day, and becoming the parent you want to be. Parenting is difficult, but it can help you build and discover your strengths and learn new things. You will grow along with your child.



*It's okay to have mixed feelings.  
Be kind and gentle with yourself.  
You will learn new skills and grow  
more confident with time.*

**It can be easier when you:**

- Have support
- Have reasonable expectations for yourself and baby
- Take care of your own needs

# POSTPARTUM EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENTS & REACTIONS

## *Postpartum Emotional Adjustments*

Pregnancy, childbirth, and infant feeding can change our bodies and our lives. Parents with a new baby often have some postpartum emotional adjustments: crying, being tired, feeling anxious, irritated, or angry; changes in sleep and appetite, feelings of guilt or doubt, or being overwhelmed. These are all normal in the early stages of parenting. About 75% of all people who give birth go through a period of “blues.” The blues typically last less than 2 weeks, but for some they become more persistent.

***“I didn’t know it would be like this.”***

Ideas and images about birth and babies are often different from how things really are. It helps to talk to other parents and share what worked and didn’t work for each of you.

**TRY** Connect with other parents in support groups online or in your community.



***“I feel overwhelmed.”***

Parenting is a job designed for a community support. Feeling like you have to do every task all on your own can be overwhelming.

**TRY** Be gentle with yourself. If you are able to look after yourself and baby in a day, you have done enough! Share your feelings with people close to you. We all need support, it’s okay to ask for help when you need it.

Rest is important for good physical and mental health. Accept that baby will be up at night and you won't get as much sleep as you want or need.

***"I'm so tired!"***

**TRY** Rest when baby sleeps. Practice deep breathing and other ways to relax. Take short breaks throughout the day to renew your energy.

Anxiety - sweating, pounding heart, or upset stomach - may make you feel like you are losing control when you are not.

**TRY** Slow down. Take deep breaths. Simplify your daily routine if you can. Talk with others about your feelings and needs.

***"I'm anxious about everything."***

***"I don't want to be touched."***

Being tired, the demands of infant feeding, body changes, and fear of pain are just some reasons why some people that have birthed don't want to be touched. This is a time for understanding in your personal relationships.

**TRY** Talk about how you feel and the kind of physical closeness you need right now. You need time for your body to heal and to adjust to your role.



***“I get upset when my baby won’t stop crying.”***

Crying is communication. Babies cry to let us know they need our help with physical or emotional needs. They might be hungry, wet, tired, uncomfortable, scared, sad, or over-stimulated.

**TRY** Soothe your baby with gentle touch, movement, or sound. If you have tried everything and baby keeps crying, let someone else hold them, or put baby in a safe place. It’s ok for babies to cry a bit. Leave the room and take some slow deep breaths to relax before you return.

You might feel angry with yourself, others, or your baby. You may be angry about how your life has changed and miss the way things used to be. Acknowledging our feelings helps us deal with them in ways that are safe for ourselves and others. It also helps to remember that our feelings are always changing. The way you feel right now will pass.

**TRY** Show your feelings through writing, drawing, physical movement, or talk to someone you trust.

***"I'm so angry!"***





***“Sometimes I have scary thoughts.”***

Some new parents have fleeting thoughts or images of harming baby, or of bad things happening. While these thoughts can be scary and make us anxious, they are common for this stage. It might help to know that people who have these thoughts very rarely act on them.

**TRY** Place baby in a safe place and take slow, deep breaths to get calm. If that doesn't work, make sure baby is safe and get help.

*\*Note: See Page 17 for a list of emergency numbers.*

## *Postpartum Emotional Reactions*

Postpartum emotional reactions are common; approximately 13% of people who give birth will have them. Often called postpartum depression, these emotional reactions are when the usual postpartum emotional adjustments get worse. There is no single cause or single treatment for a postpartum emotional reaction.

***Important: If your feelings stop you from doing your daily activities, talk to your healthcare provider.***

## *Postpartum Psychosis*

This is a rare but serious problem that affects 1-2 people in every 1000 births. It often occurs early after birth. Signs should not be ignored at any time.

When this happens, the parent will not be aware of their behaviour. Family and friends will be more likely to notice if their loved one seems to be:

- losing connection with reality
- hallucinating
- speaking unclearly
- extremely depressed
- feeling sped up (manic)
- going without sleep for long periods of time

***Important: This condition needs immediate medical attention.***

### *If you take medication:*

Learn more about any product – prescription drugs, over-the-counter treatments, natural or herbal remedies – you take for postpartum emotional reactions.

### *Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist:*

- What does this product do?
- When will it start working?
- How will I know it's working?
- How long do I have to take it?
- What are the side effects?
- What happens if I get pregnant while using it?
- How does it affect breast milk?

***Important: Let your healthcare provider know if you are using other drugs, herbal remedies or medication. Let them know immediately if you have a reaction or side effects.***

To learn more about taking medication in pregnancy or while feeding breast milk, contact Motherisk (Toronto Hospital) toll-free at 1-877-439-2744 or see their website: [www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org)

### *Fear of medication:*

Some people feel afraid or ashamed to take medication, even if their doctor says it's safe. Some medications have side effects which might impact your life. However, there can be risks when people don't get the medication they need to take care of themselves or their baby.

# \*NURSE YOURSELF

The NURSE method can prompt you to take care of yourself.

**N = nourishment**

**U = understanding**

**R = rest & relaxation**

**S = self**

**E = energy**

## *Nourishment*

As parents, we take care of other's needs as well as our own. When we feel overwhelmed, depressed, or anxious, it's easy to ignore our own basic needs. Breastfeeding or chest feeding parents may be particularly hungry at this time.

### **Eat regularly.**

Eating enough helps give us the energy we need and supports a positive mood. Aim to have regular meals and snacks throughout the day and evening.

### **Make eating easy.**

Eating is more important than cooking. Ready-to-eat or easy-to-prepare foods can help us get the nutrition we need. You don't have to cook everything from scratch. It's also okay to ask others to help.

### **Eat a variety of foods.**

Variety helps us meet all our various nutrient needs. Try to include foods from each food group everyday. Don't stress about portions or having a perfect balance of food groups in a day. The most important thing is that you eat.

## **Enjoy your food.**

There is social pressure on us to be thin, no matter what our natural body size and shape. We're often told to eat foods that are good for us and to avoid foods that are bad for us. There are no good or bad foods. The value of food is to enjoy it. Food is fuel to give your body energy to care for your baby and yourself. Connecting with other people at meal times is good for our mental health.

## *Understanding*

Accept that moods are always changing. This helps us be gentle with ourselves when we have intense feelings. We see images of parents and families who always seem happy and content but this isn't reality for most of us. Being unhappy, frustrated, or angry at times doesn't mean we don't love our children or want to care for them.

It helps to:

### **Listen to your body.**

Our feelings tell us how we are doing. When we ignore these signals, bodies find other ways – like illness or pain – to get our attention.

### **Accept your feelings.**

All emotions are ok. Try to accept your feelings without judging or pushing them away. Practice different ways to express intense emotions safely.

### **Shape your thoughts.**

Think and do things that make you positive and hopeful. Reflecting on gratitude, saying affirmations, meditating or praying can encourage positive thoughts.



### *Rest & relaxation*

Getting enough rest and knowing how to relax are important for physical and mental health. A baby in the house can sometimes make that seem impossible!

It helps to:

#### **Rest and relax.**

When sleep is interrupted, it can get harder to fall asleep. Try deep breathing, listening to music, reading, walking – anything that makes you feel calm and relaxed may help you rest.

#### **Slow down your breathing.**

Use your finger to trace the infinity symbol to the right. As you trace the first loop, inhale deeply. As your finger crosses the centre, pause a moment, then exhale completely as you trace the second loop.



#### **Acknowledge your hard work.**

If you have cared for yourself and your child in a day, then you have done well!

## *Self*

Parents often don't have time to do all the things they did before baby arrived. Everyone needs time to restore energy and enthusiasm for life.

It helps to:

**Do things you enjoy that make you feel good about yourself.**

**Explore new ideas and activities.**

Time alone, being in nature, writing, music, arts, crafts or social activities are just some of the many ways we can care for ourselves. Some may find that connecting to their faith or spirituality by attending religious services or ceremonies can support positive feelings.

**Have hope.**

Know you're not alone in the way you feel right now. Trust that things will change for the better with time.

**Accept change.**

A baby changes everything about our lives. Give yourself time to become a new version of yourself.

## *Energy*

Building energy improves our mental and physical well-being.

Physical activity:

- improves mood
- reduces stress
- builds energy we can use for other things

**Look for ways to be active in your everyday life.**

Walking or dancing with baby and doing activities you enjoy can be energizing.

# WOMEN'S HEALTH CLINIC MOTHERS PROGRAM

The Mothers Program offers community-based programs in Winnipeg to support parents. All parents and caregivers of infants are welcomed.

## *Families Connecting*

Drop-in groups that connect pregnant people and parents of children under age 1 with other families, and health professionals. Healthy snacks, coupons for free milk up to 6 months postpartum, bus tokens and childcare for older children are available.

## *Coping with Change*

A facilitated group for parents with a new baby to meet and talk openly about the range of feelings that come when a baby joins their lives

For more information on all our programs for parents, please call **204-947-2422 ext. 113**.

Or email **mothersprogram@womenshealthclinic.org**

Please see our website for a list of current workshops, support groups, and resources: **www.womenshealthclinic.org**

Visit us on Facebook: **@whcmothersprogram**

# GETTING HELP

Finding support in your community can help you deal with the stress in your life and the demands of parenting.

Ask someone nearby that you trust for help. If you are worried about yourself or your baby, go to the nearest hospital emergency department.

*If you need immediate help, call:*

WRHA Mobile Crisis Unit            204-940-1781

Klinic Crisis Line                    204-786-8686

Toll-free (outside Winnipeg)    1-888-322-3019

TTY                                        204-784-4097

or go to Crisis Response Centre - 817 Bannatyne Avenue (24 hours)

*If you are being hurt in a relationship:*

**Call:**

Province-wide Crisis Line            1-877-977-0007  
(toll-free outside Winnipeg)

**Online:**

[www.gov.mb.ca/fs/fvpp/index.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/fvpp/index.html)

*If you have questions or concerns:*

**Call a Public Health Nurse**

Go to: [www.gov.mb.ca/health/rha/contact.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/rha/contact.html) for contacts in your local Regional Health Authority, or call your local hospital for the number of the community health office in your area.

**Call Health Links**

Health Links is a 24-hour phone line answered by nurses.

In Winnipeg:	204-788-8200
Toll-free (outside Winnipeg)	1-888-315-9257

**Call your family doctor, midwife, or baby’s doctor.**

**Visit Women’s Health Clinic online.**

We have a current list of community resources in print and online on our website: [www.womenshealthclinic.org](http://www.womenshealthclinic.org)

*For breastfeeding or chest feeding support:*

**Call:**

Breastfeeding Hotline	204-788-8667
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Women’s Hospital Breastfeeding support	204-787-1166
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**Online:**

LaLeche League of Manitoba website	<a href="http://www.lllc.ca">www.lllc.ca</a>
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Motherisk (Toronto Hospital) website	<a href="http://www.motherisk.org">www.motherisk.org</a>
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## **Caring for a baby is hard work.**

You can help make it easier. Your gift helps us provide *Coping with Change* support groups and update this booklet with the most current research. Donate now to help a new parent in Winnipeg today. Thank you.

## ***S'occuper d'un bébé, c'est beaucoup de travail.***

*Vous pouvez contribuer à rendre cette tâche plus facile. Votre don nous aide à former des groupes de soutien « Vivre avec le changement » et à mettre à jour la présente brochure en fonction des toutes dernières recherches. Faites un don dès maintenant pour aider une nouveau parent, à Winnipeg. Merci.*



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