

Becoming a parent can bring love, joy and a strong sense of connection, but it can also feel overwhelming, exhausting and uncertain. Many parents are surprised by how much life changes after having a baby. Changes to sleep, identity, relationships, work and daily routines can all take a toll.

It is common to experience a mix of emotions during this time. For some parents, these feelings settle as they adjust. For others, distress can become more persistent and may be a sign of perinatal anxiety or depression. Around 1 in 5 mums and 1 in 10 dads experience perinatal depression or anxiety. These are common and treatable conditions, and support is available.

If things feel harder than expected, you are not failing. There is no perfect parent, and it is okay to need support.

### Practical Ways To Support Yourself

- **Stay Connected.** Try to keep in touch with people who help you feel supported. This might be a partner, family member, friend, parent group or health professional. Even brief interaction can help you feel less alone.
- **Lower The Pressure.** Parenthood can bring many expectations, both from others and from yourself. Focus on what matters most right now, leave the mess on the floor and the dishes in the sink, and let go of perfection. Good enough is enough.
- **Rest When You Can.** Broken sleep is part of early parenting, but small changes can still help. If possible, rest when your baby rests, share overnight care where you can, and create a calming wind-down routine before bed.
- **Review Your Bedtime Routine.** Think about whether your current bedtime habits are helping you wind down. If possible, try limiting screen time before bed, using softer lighting, keeping a regular bedtime or resting whenever you can.
- **Use Simple Calming Strategies.** Slow breathing, mindfulness, gentle stretching, listening to music or stepping outside for fresh air can help reduce stress and bring your nervous system back into balance.
- **Keep Moving In Ways That Feel Manageable.** Gentle physical activity, such as walking with the baby carrier or pram or stretching at home, can support mood, reduce stress and improve sleep.
- **Eat Regularly & Stay Hydrated.** Looking after a baby can make it easy to skip meals. Regular, nutritious food and enough water throughout the day can make a difference to your energy and concentration.
- **Create a daily routine.** Having stability and structure to your day can help to manage feelings of overwhelm. Ideally, you'll find the balance between having activities to do but not feeling overscheduled and rushed. At the same time, on some days things won't go to plan so it's ok to adapt and be flexible when changes are needed.
- **Limit Unhelpful Comparison.** Social media and outside opinions can sometimes increase pressure. Try to notice what leaves you feeling worse and give yourself permission to step back.
- **Laugh.** It may feel like the last thing you want to do, but laughing has been shown to reduce stress, releases the so-called 'happy hormones' and improves negative emotions. There's a reason funny online videos are so popular!
- **Practice Gentle Gratitude.** Try to notice small things you appreciate in yourself or others. This can help shift your focus, even briefly, and create more space for self-compassion and connection.
- **Set Some Boundaries.** Saying no is really important when you're feeling stretched or overwhelmed. Drop the guilt and stay home or reschedule if you don't feel you can commit to something or if you need someone else to give you some space for a while.
- **Make Time For Self-Care.** Even small acts of self-care, like having a bath, putting on a face mask, doing some craft or art activity, reading a book, stepping outside or taking a few quiet minutes, can help you recharge and support your emotional wellbeing.
- **Make Space For Small Moments Of Enjoyment.** A warm drink, a shower, music, time outside or noticing your baby's expressions can offer brief but meaningful moments of relief and connection.

- **Talk About How You Are Feeling.** If you are struggling, say it out loud to someone you trust. Sharing what is going on can be the first step towards feeling supported.

### When To Reach Out For Extra Support

It is a good idea to seek support if difficult feelings are lasting for two weeks or more, are becoming more intense, or are affecting your ability to cope with daily life, relationships or caring for yourself or your baby.

You might notice ongoing worry, panic, irritability, sadness, tearfulness, guilt, racing thoughts, trouble sleeping even when tired, or feeling disconnected from yourself or your baby. These experiences are not uncommon, and help is available.

You can start by speaking with your regular GP, child and family health nurse, midwife or another trusted health professional.

### Support Services

- Gidget Foundation Australia
- Beyond Blue
- Lifeline
- PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia)
- If you or your baby are in immediate danger, call 000.

Support is available, and reaching out early can make a real difference. You do not have to navigate this transition on your own. 🌸