What is the Postpartum Well-Being Study?

This is a National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)-funded study that explores postpartum well-being among women with diverse sexual histories and sexual orientations. This study is a multisite study and it is being conducted by Dr. Abbie Goldberg at Clark University, in collaboration with Dr. Lori Ross at the University of Toronto and Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

Who should receive the survey?

Every woman attending the clinic for prenatal care. The ideal time frame is 25-32 weeks gestation, although the questionnaire can be given as early as 20 weeks and as late as 36 weeks.

What do women do with the survey?

Please ask women to complete the survey (it should take 2 minutes), place the survey in the envelope provided, and then put it in the locked, black box on the front desk that says “survey” on their way out today; OR, it can be mailed to Abbie Goldberg at Clark University.

Why should I ask women to complete the survey?

This is ground-breaking research that may assist health professionals to help future new mothers. All information is kept confidential. Participants can earn up to $175.

What should women expect if they fill out the survey?

Some of them will be called by our research team to participate in the next few weeks. Some may not be called, as we cannot invite every woman to participate (some are not eligible).

Who can I contact for more information, or to get more surveys?

Project Director, US, Abbie Goldberg, agoldberg@clarku.edu

Project Director, Canada, Lori Ross, lori.ross@camh.ca

Research Coordinator, Canada, Corey Flanders, corey.flanders@camh.ca
Room for improvement: noise on a maternity ward

In the United States, 98.6% of childbirth takes place in a hospital setting. Postpartum hospital stay is meant to create an environment of resting, healing, and bonding; however, a maternity ward may also expose mothers to disruptions and excessive noise levels.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that hospitals maintain noise levels around 30-40 decibels (dB). Most hospitals unfortunately ignore these guidelines. Many studies demonstrate that high noise levels can act as a stressor for patients and staff and cause a variety of negative health effects. These effects can include increased heart rate and blood pressure along with sleep loss.

This paper recommends that hospitals implement quiet time interventions in order to reduce noise and interruptions. This quiet time may consist of dimming the lights, lowering telephone and pager volumes, and closing patient rooms. Studies show that this quiet time is well-received among patients and staff and contributes to a productive healing and bonding environment in the maternity ward.

Click HERE to access the full article.

Changes in Parenting Self-Efficacy and Mood Symptoms in the Transition to Parenthood: A Bidirectional Association

One important cognitive construct that appears during the transition to parenthood is parenting self-efficacy, or expectations about the ability to parent successfully. Mood states and symptoms such as depression and anxiety may become prevalent during the prenatal period. Many studies of parent self-efficacy and mood symptoms indicate that there is a relationship between the two; however, these studies only include depressive symptoms and fail to examine others such as anxiety.

The current study looked at 822 first-time pregnant women with a mean age of 30.15 years. The women filled out questionnaires at 32 weeks of pregnancy, and at 3 and 12 months postpartum. The questionnaires measured parenting self-efficacy, depressive symptoms, and anxiety symptoms.

Results indicate that higher parenting self-efficacy was associated with decreased anxiety and depressive symptoms and vice versa. In addition, high self-efficacy at 3 months postpartum predicted less anxiety between 3 and 12 months postpartum.

The authors conclude that parenting self-efficacy is closely linked to mental health and predicts the well-being of first-time mothers. They suggest that utilizing interventions to diminish feelings of incompetence and depression in new mothers can lead to increases in parenting self-efficacy and decrease stress.

Click HERE to access the full article.
Postpartum Well-Being Research

(from International Journal of Women’s Health, Nov. 2014)

Postpartum depression on the neonatal intensive care unit: current perspectives

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that about 15% of new mothers meet the criteria for postpartum depression (PPD) in the United States. More broadly, 50%-80% of new mothers experience at least some PPD symptoms including fatigue and mood swings.

Mothers of NICU infants often must tend to fussy and discontented infants with significant physical and mental health/behavioral problems. Research indicates that PPD is directly related to the child’s behavior problems and patterns of social play. This article reviews the relationship between the complex issues of NICU infants and the associate risk factors associated with PPD.

Mothers of NICU infants are at an elevated risk for relationship difficulties, stress, and financial pressures. The NICU itself can be stressful due to the many sights and sounds experienced in it, minimal lighting, and the poor physical appearances of the infants. These mothers may also experience feeling out of control and hopeless due to being separated from their infants.

In order to effectively screen new mothers for PPD in the NICU, further research must explore how to apply existing instruments to fit this overwhelming setting. Beneficial interventions can include parental education, focusing on the infant’s unique physical and behavioral characteristics, and training. Family-based interventions seem to best-improve psychological well-being. Journal writing is one cost-effective method of managing emotional experiences in the NICU.

Click HERE to access the full article.

Postpartum Well-Being Research

(from Psychiatria Polska, 2014)

Physical activity and childbirth classes during a pregnancy and the level of perceived stress and depressive symptoms in women after childbirth

Many childbirth classes aim to help parents prepare for pregnancy and labor using theoretical and physical exercises. These classes teach new parents how to care for their infant and prepare for breastfeeding. Many classes also utilize physical exercise in order to prepare women for childbirth. The current study assessed the effectiveness of these classes in the prevention of postpartum emotional disorders.

The study looked at 100 women, half of which had not taken part in childbirth classes. They were assessed for depressive symptoms, stress, and overall well-being. Of these women, 34% displayed symptoms of postpartum depression while 22% experienced high levels of perceived stress.

While the results were not statistically significant, women who did attend the classes had lower depressive symptoms and stress levels and less fear over possible birth complications. The authors also note the importance of social support in the well-being of a new mother. Reduced well-being was seen in mothers who underwent a caesarean section or gave birth to a premature infant. They also conclude that physical activity can help to prevent postpartum emotional disorders.

Click HERE to access the full article.
New Treatment for Postnatal Depression a Success

Postnatal depression can have a devastating effect on a mother’s mental health and relationship with her infant and her family if left untreated.

Each year in Australia, about 40,000 women experience postnatal depression by the time their baby is three months old, yet more than 50 per cent of mothers with postnatal depression don’t seek help because they worry that they will be seen as a failure, don’t know the signs of depression or are concerned about passing medications to the baby through breast milk.

A new world-first trial is changing the way women can get help for postnatal depression and the results are impressive. More than 70 per cent of depressed women had a dramatic improvement.

The $125,000 trial, by the Parent-Infant Research Institute and funded by beyondblue, included women from all around Australia who experienced moderate to severe postnatal depression and agreed to take part.

The MumMoodBooster program is the first fully developed and evaluated online treatment for women, with online sessions, videos, and discussion forums for both mums involved in the program and their partners.

Lead researcher Professor Jeannette Milgrom, from the Parent-Infant Research Institute (PIRI), said women engaged well with the program with two thirds posting on the online community forum during the trial.

"Our results show that our fully-developed online program, MumMoodBooster, is an effective treatment option for women with clinically diagnosed PND. This program is potentially accessible to large numbers of women in metropolitan, rural and remote areas,” she said.

"MumMoodBooster may change the way women with PND are treated after they are diagnosed. Women can receive treatment in the comfort of their own home which in turn will help to relieve the burden on existing health services.”

Of the women who participated in existing standard routine care for PND, only 15.8 per cent had recovered from their depression at the end of the 12-week trial. In contrast, of the women who had used the MumMoodBooster online intervention and telephone support, more than four times as many women (71.4 per cent) were no longer diagnosed as depressed at the end of the trial.

beyondblue CEO Georgie Harman said if implemented nationally, this program could benefit thousands of Australian women who might be experiencing postnatal depression and are not aware of the help available, are too embarrassed or too ashamed to reach out for help from a health professional.

"We know many mums with PND are afraid people will think they are not good mothers, and we hope they will use this online program at home to help them with their mental health and their parenting,” she said.

"This study shows that an online program with interactive options, supported by some telephone coaching, is a very effective way of treating PND.”

Post and Antenatal Depression Association Acting (PANDA) CEO Jenni Richardson said a specialist perinatal helpline or online program accessed in the home can be life changing for women.

"We hear from distressed mums who will not seek help because of the fear of being labelled a ‘bad mother’ or who struggle to leave their home due to depression or anxiety on top of the demands of a new baby. PIRI and beyondblue are to be congratulated on the MumMoodBooster program,” she said.

The Parent-Infant Research Institute partnered with Dr Brian Danaher and Dr John Steeley from the Oregon Research Institute in the US, who are behaviour change experts and spent three years (prior to the beyondblue-funded trial) developing an internet treatment intervention for women diagnosed with PND, which was funded by the National Institute of Health. The trial also received initial funding from the Windermere Foundation.

MumMoodBooster is currently seeking new mums who may be struggling to cope for an ongoing treatment trial. To register or find out more, please go to our www.mummoodbooster.com or contact a phone coach on (03) 9496 4496.

Click HERE to go to this article’s associated webpage.
Perinatal Mental Health

Pregnancy is challenging for many women; however, for a minority of women it can be overshadowed by mental illness. The Lancet's Perinatal Mental Health Series reviews the effects of perinatal mental disorders on mother and child. The first of three papers examines non-psychotic mental illness, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The second paper looks at serious mental illness, focusing on bipolar disorder, psychosis, and schizophrenia; and the third paper summarizes evidence for the effects of parental mental health on the child: from fetal development to adolescence across a range of low and high income countries.

Some important information to take away from these papers includes that all types of mental disorders can occur during pregnancy including anxiety, eating disorders, and psychoses. The rates of these disorders are comparable to rates at other times, but they are especially important during pregnancy due to their effect on the fetus and the family. Psychological help can improve symptoms, but the overall effectiveness depends on a variety of genetic and environmental factors. Treatment may be costly, but spending the money early on can prevent cycles of psychological symptoms from becoming more severe.

Screening is also important in order to detect the presence of mental disorders during pregnancy. The UK mandates screening for depression, but other disorders also need to be taken into consideration. Paternal depression should also be taken into account, as well as other caregivers involved.

The cited research also indicates that the health of the mother is very closely linked to the health and the functioning of the fetus. While physical health is important, mental health should also be monitored because the presence of any mental disorders can also lead to poor physical health.

Click HERE to hear the audio clip.

Yoga Techniques to Help New Mothers Recover From Pregnancy

Yoga instructor Wendy Wyvill suffered many different aches and pains after giving birth to her son, despite never having had poor posture or body aches prior to his birth.

Wyvill was suffering from what's known as "new mum's syndrome": injuries and bad posture arising from caring for a baby. Various movements such as carrying, feeding and lifting your baby can cause serious distress to the body if not performed correctly, even for someone as fit as Wyvill.

Weak abs, constant bending, lifting and moving, and carrying the baby over one hip, caused Wyvill some back pain. The surge of relaxin, a hormone produced during pregnancy that increases the elasticity and relaxation of muscles, tendons and ligaments, didn't help either. The slackness remains for months after delivery, and leaves joints vulnerable to strain.

But the biggest strain was not physical; it was emotional. "I was exhausted, and went through a lot of anxiety because of not being able to sleep. My body was constantly in fight-or-flight mode, so I was really depleted," she says.

Working on deep breathing can really help, Wyvill says. This can be done any time, even during breastfeeding or when going for a walk with baby.

Daily yoga helped Wyvill restore balance to her body and mind. She recommends doing this circuit of exercises for 30 minutes daily, or five to 10 minutes if you're short of time. They will strengthen the body, promote better posture, prevent injuries, release tension and calm the mind.

Check out the article for pictures and descriptions of different yoga poses beneficial to new mothers, as well as suggestions for posture and avoiding injury!

Click HERE to go to this article’s associated webpage.
Making the Most of Baby's First Holiday

(from parents.com, Dec. 2007)

Tips for Your Baby’s First Holiday

Get a New Holiday Game Plan

You've been through this before: When you got married, you had to figure out how to split up the holidays (alternating Thanksgiving and Christmas with his family and yours every other year; Hanukkah shared with both, etc.). Now that you have a family of your own, this is the year to decide what's yours and what's your parents'. Where will you have the big holiday dinner? Where will you open presents? Make those decisions now and be clear with your families to avoid any hurt feelings later.

Want baby to wake up in her own home Christmas morning? Invite family members to come to you (if you're comfortable hosting) -- if not, make plans to see them later.

Start Making (Family) History

Start a totally new tradition this year -- something that the three of you will do this holiday and then make a lifelong family ritual. Don't stress over trying to do something big (Rockefeller Center and the Rockettes can wait); small, simple gestures can be just as meaningful.

Fun ideas? Give everybody holiday pj's on Christmas Eve and then snap a pic of everyone wearing them. Open gifts from Santa -- just one for each of you -- at a special time when no one else is around. For Hanukkah, play hooky one weekday morning and go out for doughnuts. Do some volunteer work: Work in a soup kitchen, or donate toys to Toys for Tots. Baby won't be able to participate in the good deeds yet, but you'll start the "lead by example" idea early.

Throw a Baby Holiday Party

Instead of hosting an open house or a big party for the adults, invite other babies and their parents over for an afternoon baby-fest. Let the babies crawl all around and socialize with each other. Have them wear Santa hats or play with shiny garland -- you with camera at the ready -- and see them entertained by all the festive decorations. The grown-ups can sip something festive and swap strategies for upcoming in-law visits.

Involve the Senses

Help baby experience the holidays through all of his senses. Let him touch and smell a clipping from the tree. Excite his eyes with the tree lights, menorah flames, or sparkly decorations. Jingle some bells for baby (just like on Santa's sleigh) and listen to holiday music. And if baby's old enough, give him a taste of some special holiday foods. He'll love the newness of it all, and you'll love watching him experience holiday fun for the first time.

Making the Most of Baby's First Holiday

Read Holiday Books to Baby

Take a month-long break from Goodnight Moon. Buy a special book, then take it out every December from now on and re-read it. We love classics like The Polar Express, The Night Before Christmas, and Hanukkah!

Chart the Change

The old cliche "time flies" never seemed more true now that you're watching your child grow. Pick an object -- the family dog, the Christmas tree, the fireplace at Grandma's house, a favorite teddy bear -- and snap a pic of everyone next to it for the first time this year, and then every year going forward. Print up the photo in black and white and buy a handful of matching frames. You can start a cool, year-by-year display of your family (hey, maybe next year you'll have a bump!) and add a new framed photo every holiday season.

Don't Overbook

You've got tons of people to see (and show baby off to), but don't forget to make time for naps and playtime. You don't want your guy being Mr. Cranky Pants in every holiday photo you snap. Remind too-pushy relatives that scheduling some downtime is a necessity -- and is non-negotiable.

Put Baby on Your Holiday Card

Of course you want to send out holiday cards to show off your beautiful babe, but don't put pressure on yourself to get gorgeous and get in the picture, too. Let baby play with something holiday related -- a shiny ornament, a dreidel, or Santa hat -- and shoot away as she giggles and explores. If she's too little to play, stick her in front of a holiday setting (like a group of poinsettias -- just make sure they're out of her reach) or lay her down on some mod holiday gift wrap. Then upload your photo to a Web photo service (tinyprints.com is one we love), select a template, and get your address labels set. Some sites, like amazingmail.com, will even mail your cards for you -- a super time-saver.

Click HERE to go to this article's associated webpage.
**Winter Baby Checklist**

Are you and your baby planning on venturing out into the cold winter weather? Let Babble help you prepare your baby for the elements with this list of winter necessities:

**Snow suit or heavy bunting**

Don’t rely on a heavy blanket to protect your baby from the elements. A warm piece that fits over her regular clothes is ideal when you’ll be moving her outdoors. This should not, however, be used as her sole outfit; instead, dress your infant in layers and check her body temperature often. “Your baby is overheated if he is sweating, has damp hair, a heat rash, rapid breathing, or is restless,” says the University of Minnesota SIDS Center.

**Hats, mittens, and foot coverings**

A knit hat and mittens will protect your infant from wind and chilly temperatures. Once indoors, these items can be removed to avoid overheating. Outfitting your little one with soft, warm baby booties will also prevent heat from escaping through his extremities.

**Car seat cover and heavy stroller blanket**

Keep your baby warm and toasty while out and about. Your little one will need an added layer of warmth and protection to enjoy family outdoor activities.

**Moisturizing lotion**

When purchasing skin products for your baby, look for non-perfumed lotions and oils specially suited to her sensitive skin. Seek out natural, soothing, and emollient ingredients such as almond, olive, coconut, or palm oil; calendula; or marigold. Most pediatricians recommend avoiding antibacterial soaps, baths, and shampoos. Also avoid any baby products containing artificial colors, allergenic or irritating preservatives (such as quaternium 15, imidazolidinyl urea, or parabens), diethanolamine (DEA) or triethanolamine (TEA), and sodium laurel sulfate or cocamide-DEA.

**Humidifier**

Dry winter air can wreak havoc on baby’s skin. An inexpensive humidifier helps keep moisture in and can eliminate or reduce chapped skin, especially around your infant’s nasal passages and mouth. Never place a humidifier next to your baby’s crib, and if you choose one that emits warm steam, make sure that no little ones can reach the steam source, which can burn their sensitive skin.

**Hand sanitizer**

Keeping yourself healthy is a vital part of caring for your baby. Hand sanitizer helps kill those nasty germs that lurk year-round, but whose effects are so devastating in winter months. While washing with soap and warm water is ideal, antibacterial gels help reduce your and your little one’s exposure to myriad contagions.

**Footed sleepers and sleep sacks**

Bundling your baby isn’t safe at night, when he can easily overheat. A footed sleeper or sleep sack allows him to stay warm and comfortable when temperatures drop, with the added convenience of not having to sort through layers to change that middle-of-the-night diaper.

**Blanket**

Lightweight receiving blankets may not provide the warmth needed during colder months. A fleece cover retains heat while protecting your baby from winter elements including snow, sleet, and wind.

**Sweater**

A staple item of any baby’s wardrobe, a sweater is an ideal layering piece. Look for a soft knit with easy buttons or snaps that will fit comfortably over her long-sleeved bodysuits.

**Fleece pad and flannel crib sheets**

While you should not cover your baby with a blanket until she is at least one year old, a fleece pad and flannel crib sheets are a great way to safely add warmth overnight. Look for pads and sheets that fit snugly over her crib mattress, to avoid an increased risk of SIDS.
Handling the Cold Winter Months

(from parents.com, Feb. 2011)

Activities For When Winter Weather Traps You Indoors

It's freezing outside and your baby has already completed his usual circuit of activity mat, bouncy seat, and Exersaucer. With hours to go before his next nap, you need tactics to keep your wee one cooing when Old Man Winter traps you indoors. Try these fun indoor activities to pass a gray day. The time will fly!

Make Some Music

Is that Dan Zanes CD scratched from constant use? Scatter about tambourines, shakers, or whatever's on hand (formula tins and wooden spoons will do!) and call band practice in your living room. Lorna Campbell, of Brooklyn, New York, likes to pluck at her husband's ukelele. When she performs for her 22-month-old daughter, Alex, the little girl bounces, claps, and tries to sing along. Now, she even asks her mom for a gig by pointing and yelling, "Uke! Uke!"

Let Her "Help" You Clean

It's a fact of babyhood: No matter how many toys a kid has, he'll prefer a broom. From the time he was a year old, Jesse Rosenthal, now 2, has loved to clean. As his mother, Nikki, dusts and sweeps, he toddles behind her, trailing his toy vacuum cleaner, broom, and dustpan. "One of his first words was 'Psst! Psst!' for the sound a spray bottle makes," says the New York City mom. Give your baby a dishrag and plastic bottle filled with water, and let him spritz and wipe the kitchen floor for some good, clean fun.

Read Together

Snuggle up on the sofa with your baby and a good read. Infants love to listen to your voice and to be held; babies age 6 to 12 months want to mouth board books; 1-year-olds start to understand the words you're saying as they help flip pages, according to the Children's Reading Foundation. Dana Burger, of Vienna, Virginia, relishes board books with her 16-month-old, Avery. "We read 15 in a sitting," she says. "Avery's a fan of Brown Bear, Brown Bear; Mr. Brown Can Moo; and Toes, Ears & Nose. I've read them so often that she can fill in words for me. It's exciting for both of us, especially when she adds a new word and claps for herself!"

Finger Paint with Food

Your kid may still think crayons are for eating, but he's probably at the right age to "finger paint" with food. This is a messy one, but yummy! Place your baby in his high chair and spoon a dollop of yogurt on the tray. You might need to demonstrate at first, but soon your munchkin will be making blueberry-colored tracks and swirls. He'll really eat it up!

Go For a Swim

Who says bathtime is only for night? Wash away the traces of your yogurt escapade with water play. Fill the tub with bubble bath, or blow bubbles over the tub and let him pop 'em. Toss in a few toys in need of a clean (that set of plastic food?) and you've got one less thing to do later.

Make it a Laundry Day

Staring down a mountain of laundry? Let your tot help you "sort" whites and darks. Later, enlist your lil' guy to "fold" the clean clothes as you work beside him. "Beckett has a blast sifting through a basket of laundry," Lauren Durazo, of San Francisco, says. "I fold a T-shirt and place it next to him. When he unfolds it, I say 'Oh no!' with both my hands on my cheeks. He thinks it's just the most hilarious thing."

Look into the Mirror

Your sweetpea is not lacking when it comes to vanity! Place her on her tummy with an unbreakable toy mirror and let her check the features in the glass. As she gets older, you can dress her up in colorful capes and sunglasses -- Lady Gaga's got nothing on your little girl!

Play Ball

Once your baby can sit up (at around 6 months), plop down across from him and introduce a ball between you. Let him reach and roll and transfer it between his hands; let him rolly over and transfer the clean clothes as you work beside him. "sort" whites and darks. Later, enlist your li'l guy to "fold" the clean clothes as you work beside him. "Beckett has a blast sifting through a basket of laundry," Lauren Durazo, of San Francisco, says. "I fold a T-shirt and place it next to him. When he unfolds it, I say 'Oh no!' with both my hands on my cheeks. He thinks it's just the most hilarious thing."

Build a Maze

Got an adventure-seeking crawler? Transform your living room into a baby-proofed labyrinth. Arrange plenty of sofa pillows and chairs with blankets draped over them, fort-style, throw in a collapsible tube tunnel (IKEA sells one for $20), and let your intrepid explorer roam! When she finally tuckers herself out, take a cue from your cutie: Dive under your covers together and cuddle.

Wishing you the best in the upcoming holiday season!

Abbie & Lori and the rest of the Postpartum Well-Being Team

PS: We're on Facebook! Even if you don't have a page of your own, you can look at the Facebook page. To check us out, click HERE.