



Post Birth Wellbeing Plan



Minding Me
Supporting Expectant and New
Mothers in Kildare West Wicklow



Introduction

It's likely that you received this workbook because you're expecting a baby or have recently given birth. Congratulations!

While becoming a mother can be a time of great joy, it can also be a time of huge change. After birth, your new baby usually becomes the sole focus of your attention. However, you also need care and support during this time. Remembering yourself and your own self-care is important for your wellbeing, and for that of your baby.

This workbook encourages you to think about and name some useful things (and people) that can help you adjust to your new role as a mother.

It is designed to help you to prepare for post birth (the time after your baby is born), but many of the suggestions around self-care and wellbeing are just as useful during pregnancy. The section on mental health difficulties may also help you during this time. Mental health difficulties in pregnancy can continue after birth, so if you feel you need support, please speak to your GP, your midwife, or your obstetrician. Getting help early gives you and your baby the best start on your journey together.

Remember, your needs matter too!

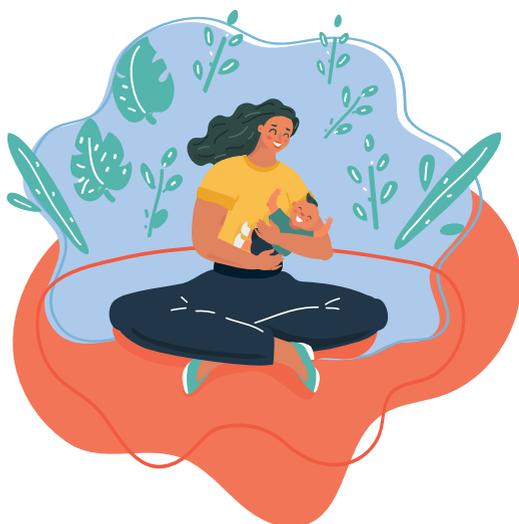


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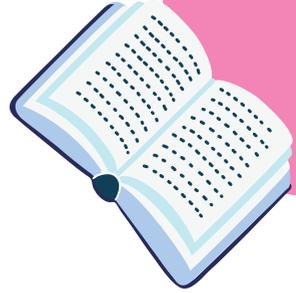
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1. General Wellbeing Plan

Nutrition



One of the most important things you can do for your wellbeing is to eat well. It's especially important to get good nutrition during the postpartum period (the time after birth). When we talk about nutrition, we don't mean dieting. We're talking about food that is nourishing and provides what you need to keep your body well. When babies arrive, we can focus so much on their feeding and other needs that we forget to look after our own. It can be hard to find the time to shop, and to make nutritious food. But it's important to mind your body. After all, it has worked so hard during pregnancy and continues to work hard in those weeks and months after birth.

Cooking and freezing meals before your baby arrives can be helpful. List some meals that you enjoy and would freeze well:



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Friends and family can help out by agreeing to cook some meals for you before (to freeze) or after your baby arrives. List some people who you can ask to do this:

BEFORE:

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AFTER:



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Think about your favourite store cupboard essentials (foods with a long shelf life) that you can easily make into simple, nutritious meals or snacks. You can stock up on these handy foods before the baby arrives. List some items below:

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Friends or family members could help with food shopping after the baby arrives. List some people you can ask to help.

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It's very important that you look after yourself as well as your baby, and friends and family are often happy to assist. So ask for help to prepare food while you're caring for your baby, or let someone else look after your baby so you can take the time to care for yourself.



Exercise



As a new mother, you may feel that caring for your baby leaves you very little spare time or energy to involve movement or exercise in your day. Movement plays an essential role in our wellbeing: it helps to reduce aches and pains, improves our mood, lowers anxiety, and helps us feel connected to ourselves and to others. It also helps you to physically recover after pregnancy and delivery. So try to make movement an essential part of your day during pregnancy and after your baby is born. Remember, **'Motion is Lotion' for the body and soul!**

What type of movement or exercise do you enjoy that might fit in with your lifestyle when you have your baby?

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Think about activities you like doing or might like to try, both with your baby and without your baby. Identify local places that you might like to go and people you might enjoy sharing these activities with.

(a) With your baby
(eg: Buggy walking/
in the park/with my neighbour)
Type of activities, where,
and with who:

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(b) Without your baby
(eg: Dance class/local community
centre/friend). Type of activities,
where, and with who:

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Do you know the recommended
Guideline Timescales for returning
to activity after having a baby?

**Gentle Abdominal and pelvic floor
exercise?**

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**Pilates/Yoga after a caesarean
delivery?**

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You can find this information in the **POGP Patient Information Leaflets** and **Return to Running Guidelines**, which you can find in the supports and services section at the back of this workbook. These are all guidelines – don't feel under pressure to do too much, too soon. Remember, everyday movement like walking, light housework, and gentle stretching is the starting point. A good way to start connecting to your pelvic muscles (both before and after having your baby) is with simple diaphragmatic (belly) breathing. This can help you feel calm and rested, and also help activate your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles. **Remember, 'Pace it don't Race it'!** Be careful with higher impact activities for up to 6 months after birth due to the hormonal effects on the joints and ligaments. If you have any health concerns or symptoms during movement, like bladder weakness or pain in your pelvis, please seek advice from your GP, maternity care provider or health care professional.

Sleep



Sleep is an important part of your mental health and wellbeing. After the birth of your baby, you will need time to recover physically and emotionally from your labour and birth experience. Your new baby will also be getting used to the world, waking up often during the night to be fed and soothed. It's likely that after the birth of your baby, you will experience sleep deprivation. So it's important to try to prioritise your sleep.

Aim to have a couple of hours of sleep in a row as often as possible. This may be possible by thinking creatively. For example, you might plan for baby to stay downstairs with your partner or a family member for their last feed, while you go to bed early and try to get some sleep; if you are breastfeeding, perhaps try to pump and get your partner to give a bottle for baby's last feed; and when you can, sleep when your baby sleeps.

A key part of the solution is to recognise the importance of sleep for your mental health and give yourself permission to ask for help. You do not need to do it all.

Caring for yourself helps you to care for your baby.

Are there ways that you can get a few hours of uninterrupted sleep in a row? (e.g., having your partner or a relative take baby for a walk, or expressing milk for a bottle if you're breastfeeding.)

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Where can you get good information about baby's sleep or your own if you need it? (e.g., GP, paediatrician, online – mychild.ie, etc.)

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Can you name some mams who you can go to for support around sleep?

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Friends or family can help by staying over with you if you feel you need to get some extra sleep or just some extra support. List some people who you can ask to do this.

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Time for Self

Getting time for yourself after your baby arrives is essential to your wellbeing. This is a time of huge change as you adjust to your role as a new mother. **It's easy to forget about your own wellbeing.** However, the better you care for yourself, the better you'll be able to care for your baby. Trying to have some time away from your baby to do things for yourself is important. It can help you to feel like yourself again. Of course, the things you choose to do may be different to what you did before you became a mother but that's OK. **The important thing is to find what works for you.**

What are some of the ways that you like to rest and recharge (e.g., read a book, watch a TV show)?

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Activities that you enjoy and can do alone (e.g., walking, cycling, photography, drawing).

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Activities you like to do with friends.

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Mini self-care activities: things you can do at home that don't need organising (e.g., taking a shower, painting my nails, breathing exercises, message or phone a friend).

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Self-care activities that are out of the house without your baby (e.g., night away, cinema, meeting with a friend).

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2. Emotional Wellness Resources

Some women may experience difficulties with their mental health in pregnancy and after birth. Knowing what to look out for and where to get help if you need it is important.

The good news is that most mental health issues that happen during this time can be successfully treated with the right support and/or intervention.

Baby Blues vs. Postpartum Depression

Baby blues are common in the first couple of weeks after the birth of your baby. However, if your symptoms continue for more than one month, you may be experiencing postpartum depression. Up to 1 in 7 mothers experience postpartum depression. It's easily treated, so it's important to seek help as soon as possible to ensure that you and your baby get off to the best start together.

SIGNS OF THE BABY BLUES

- Crying easily
- Feeling sad or anxious
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Mood swings
- Appetite problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Usually lasts 1-3 weeks

SIGNS OF POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

- Low mood
- Loss of motivation/interest
- Loss of pleasure in things you enjoy
- Crying easily
- Fear that you're not a good enough mother
- Not feeling connected to your baby
- Anger/irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness
- Difficulty making decisions
- Hopelessness for future
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- Difficulty sleeping, even when your baby is asleep

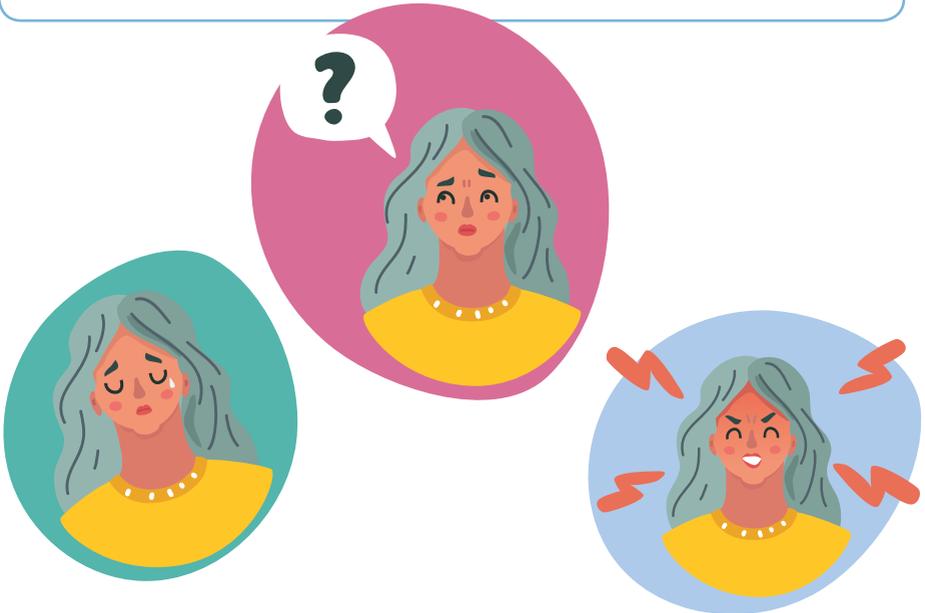


Normal New Mam Worry vs. Postpartum Anxiety

Some anxiety is normal, particularly in the early days and weeks after birth as you adjust to being a new mother and get to know your new baby. You may worry about harm coming to the baby, about feeding/sleeping routines, managing competing demands (other children/household, etc.), being a 'good enough' mother. However, if this anxiety causes you a lot of distress and interferes with your ability to cope day to day, then you may need some extra help. This can happen for 6% of pregnant women and up to 10% of postpartum women. With the right help, anxiety can be easily and successfully treated.

SYMPTOMS OF POSTPARTUM ANXIETY INCLUDE:

- Constant worry
- Panic
- Feeling 'on edge', as if something bad is going to happen
- Racing thoughts
- Inability to sit still
- Disturbances in sleep/appetite
- Physical symptoms (such as heaviness on chest, difficulty breathing, sweating, or nausea)



Birth Trauma

The birth of your baby may not happen the way you planned or wished for. Parts of the labour and birth experience may be traumatic for some women: intense or poorly controlled pain, emergency medical intervention, physical injury. The care and support you receive from maternity staff during this time is very important. It's important to know that your experience of trauma is based on how you feel about your birth experience, not on the outcome of the birth.

A traumatic birth can lead to feelings of disappointment, anger, or sadness. You may need support to talk through these feelings. For approximately 3% of mothers, a traumatic birth may contribute to post-traumatic stress disorder. If you are experiencing symptoms of PTSD, please seek treatment as soon as you can so that you can begin to recover.

SYMPTOMS OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS INCLUDE:

- Intrusive memories/flashbacks/nightmares about the birth
- Avoidance of thinking or talking to others about the birth experience
- Feeling of heightened anxiety/being on edge/irritable
- Hypervigilance about baby – constantly checking on baby to make sure they're still breathing, unable to leave baby even for short periods
- Low mood, tearfulness that lasts beyond 2-3 weeks postpartum

BIRTH REFLECTION SERVICE

A *Birth Reflection Service* is a listening service for women who have recently given birth. This service gives you an opportunity to talk through your birth experience. It helps you gain a clear picture of what happened during labour by providing factual information, and provides a space for you to work through your feelings/emotional experience. If you feel this service may be useful, please ask your maternity care providers if it's available at your maternity hospital.



Intrusive Thoughts

Intrusive thoughts are unwanted thoughts that pop into your mind out of the blue and cause discomfort or distress. Everyone experiences intrusive thoughts occasionally. These kinds of thoughts are common in the time after birth, especially if you suffer from anxiety or depression. The thoughts usually involve harm coming to you, your baby, or a loved one. At times, these thoughts may be accompanied by compulsive behaviours, such as checking or avoiding things that trigger the thoughts.

TYPES OF INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

- Harming yourself
- Harming your baby/partner (e.g., accidentally dropping the baby down the stairs)
- Intrusive sexual thoughts (e.g., doing something sexually inappropriate when changing your baby's nappy)

MYTHS ABOUT INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

- ✗ All thoughts are meaningful
- ✗ Intrusive thoughts are a reflection of your wishes/desires
- ✗ An intrusive thought will lead to an action
- ✗ You are the only person that has these thoughts
- ✗ Intrusive thoughts mean you are a 'bad person'
- ✗ Intrusive thoughts mean you are 'going crazy'

WAYS TO COPE

- » Talk about the thoughts with someone you trust—maybe a friend, family member or a health professional
- » Understand thoughts as random mental events, not intentions or desires
- » Avoid trying to stop the thoughts or push them away. If you can, just note the thoughts as random mental events. In this way, they will usually pass more quickly
- » Avoid thinking about what the thoughts say about you
- » Expect the thoughts may happen again
- » Remember, intrusive thoughts are automatic – they just happen



Getting Help

Where to get help if you need support with Postpartum Depression, Postpartum Anxiety, Post-traumatic Stress, or Intrusive Thoughts.

If you feel you need extra support, please talk to a family member or friend and speak to any of the professionals below (include their name and contact details if you know them):

Your GP

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Your Public Health Nurse

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Your midwife

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Your obstetrician

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(Please see the list of supports and services at the back of this workbook for additional sources of support).



Know the Signs

- I don't feel like myself*
- I feel disconnected from everyone*
- The things that I used to enjoy don't make me happy*
- I feel like something is wrong*
- I don't feel a connection with my baby*
- I can't stop worrying*

If you can't recognise these signs in yourself, your partner, a close family member, or a friend might. Share this list and ask them to tell you if they see any.



Notes

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Notes

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your
mental
health.ie

Information | Support | Services

1800 111 888

The www.yourmentalhealth.ie website provides information and signposting on all mental health supports and services that are available nationally and locally provided by the HSE and its funded partners. You can also call the freephone YourMentalHealth Information Line to find supports and services **1800 111 888** (any time, day or night).

Parenting
Support.ie

Providing information on parenting supports and services in Kildare and Wicklow:

www.parentingsupport.ie



Seirbhís Sláinte
Níos Fearr
á Forbairt

Building a
Better Health
Service



Connecting for Life
Kildare and West Wicklow