

How Postpartum Mothers Cope with Stress?

Mothers have various sources of stress following delivery, such as wound and musculoskeletal pain, sleep deprivation caused by round-the-clock baby care, and adjustment to changes in family life, etc., all of which may cause exhaustion. If there are additional stressors like work challenges, financial difficulties, issues on family acceptance and conflicts on child care, their emotion may be affected. Persistent negative emotions without appropriate management may lead to emotional disturbance.

Managing stress effectively not only alleviates emotional distress, but also enhances our ability in facing different life circumstances. In addition, confidence in dealing with future stressors can be built up. To provide a stable family for their children to grow up healthily and happily, mothers may refer to the following tips for better stress coping:

Self-Help Tips

Try to recognise and manage your stress

- Understand the source of your stress, e.g., physiological and psychological adjustment following delivery, baby's health, parenting skills, finance, family relationship, etc.
- If the stress is temporary, you can encourage yourself that it won't last long
- If the stress is more persistent, you may adjust your expectations so that you may feel more relaxed
- Brainstorm and try different ways to handle the problem, which include seeking professional assistance where appropriate (e.g. consult the healthcare staff of Maternal and Child Health Centre (MCHC) for breastfeeding advice)

Cultivate effective communication

- Tell your partner and family members how you feel and what you need so that they can offer help and support
- Understand each other's views and needs; continue to show your love, respect and support despite disagreement
- Be open during negotiation to come up with mutually acceptable solutions

Strengthen social support networks, connect with other parents, and share with friends you trust

Take care of your own basic needs

- Maintain a balanced diet, get enough rest and sleep;
- Ask for help from other family members for household chores and childcare when necessary

Spare some time for leisure activities, either alone or with your partner

Practice relaxation exercise, e.g.



progressive muscle relaxation



diaphragmatic breathing
(only available in Cantonese)



guided imagery
(only available in Cantonese)

Warning Signs of Significant Distress

In general, it is natural to have emotions when facing life changes. However, if the mother's mood does not improve over time or significantly interferes with daily life, e.g. absent-minded, making frequent mistakes etc., professional help is warranted (for major symptoms of postnatal depression, see the leaflet "Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health" on p.97-102). You can consult your family doctor, obstetrician, social worker, counsellor or healthcare staff of Maternal and Child Health Centre in your residential area for timely referral to appropriate specialist or community services. You can also approach a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist for assessment.