



# Transitioning to **MOTHERHOOD**

DR QURATULAIN ZAIDI of **MindNLife** discusses the stress of becoming a new mum, and some of the ways to combat it.

There is still something of a stigma around postnatal depression (PND) in Hong Kong. Motherhood is typically viewed as a “happy time” and childbirth as an event from which a woman should “bounce back” – even within a few days. As a result, many women experience a lack of understanding or support from those around them. Mothers need significant coping skills to deal with the many new challenges they face, from the physical adjustment, to insecurities about the ability to parent, and a loss of previous identity. Here are just a few of the ways to do this.

## 10 Coping Strategies for New Mums

**#1** Recognise and pay attention to your emotional state. This is very important, as you’re the only one who knows how you are feeling. Many women feel a bit down, tearful or anxious in the first week after giving birth. This is often called the “baby blues”, and is so common that it’s considered normal. Onset of the baby blues is often around two to three days after birth, and it generally doesn’t last for more than a few weeks. If your symptoms last longer or start later, you could have postnatal (or postpartum) depression; postnatal depression can start any time in the first year after giving birth, and many women don’t realise they have it, because it can develop gradually.

**#2** Talk to your partner and work out a plan for your new lives with a baby. Discuss the issues: How are you going to handle visiting in-laws? Who’s going to get up in the middle of the night? And how does each of you feel about letting a baby cry?

It’s important to be on the same page with your partner emotionally and intellectually on parenting strategies. Things seem much more manageable and disagreements can be resolved easily when you’re not sleep deprived and physically and emotionally exhausted. So, don’t leave it till the baby arrives.

**#3** Incorporate daily activities that fill you up emotionally and that you enjoy; postpone energy-draining activities and projects.

**#4** Stay flexible! The first year of a new baby's life requires parents to adapt, and if you're flexible in your approach this journey can be easier.

**#5** Keep a log of your baby's feeding, sleeping and crying habits. It will help you identify patterns and give you a record you can use for instructing caregivers.

**#6** Rethink your priorities. Only put on your regular to-do list those tasks that absolutely have to get done. How do you know what to include and what to leave out? If it's something that puts your family's health, safety and well-being at risk, of course you must include it. But do outsource things that you dread doing or that can be done just as well by someone else.

**#7** Invest in your relationship with your partner. Get hugs from each other when you can, and, as soon as you're well enough, plan weekly date nights that cannot be missed. Some ground rules: You're only allowed to talk about baby for 10 minutes! It's so often the relationship with the husband that gets neglected when baby arrives, so make time for each other.

**#8** Be mindful of the internet. Some online forums can provide a sanity check for new parents, but beware of information overload. Parents need to keep in mind that not everything they read is reliable or a good fit for their family.

**#9** Join a new mum's support group so you're surrounded by women who are going through the same stages of being a mum; it helps you to know that you are normal. However, beware of the risks of comparing – resist the urge to “compare and despair” when it comes to your baby and anyone else's.

**#10** It's so important to find humour in what you do, and to laugh.

### Managing Sleep Deprivation

- For a large part of the first year, sleep can be a rare commodity. Yet research shows that it's a medical necessity for new mums, and also an important way to guard against postnatal depression. When one parent is up, the other one should be sleeping; and, if you have a helper at home, do take advantage of having another pair of hands during the day to rest.
- Address your baby's sleep issues sooner rather than later. Work with a professional, preferably your paediatrician, or a

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baby sleep consultant (there are good ones available in Hong Kong). Get a good book on sleep techniques and get started on getting your nights back.

- Do not take on a “super mum” role. It's so tempting to insist on doing everything for the baby – changing every nappy and so on; but you do just end up exhausted, which won't help the baby – or you.



### Rethink Your Routine

The first year is very disruptive to your schedule; it's a physically and emotionally demanding time when you need to be nurturing your baby and yourself. This might seem counterintuitive, but when you're tired, exercise can boost your energy. A pre-dinner walk with spouse and baby, for example, can be really fulfilling. It changes

the brain chemistry and produces chemicals that are so helpful for your mood and affect.

### Maintain Perspective

Always remind yourself that this phase of the baby's dependency on you is temporary – it will pass; they grow up so quickly, so enjoy them. Have patience, too; the joys of having children far outweigh the stresses. Above all, though, be honest with yourself, and seek help if you are struggling. *ε*



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