‘Time for self’ promotes maternal mental health

As many as 1 in 3 women experience depression in the first four years after having a baby. Recently, we reported that mothers who had regular time for themselves (when someone else cared for their baby) were less likely to be depressed at 6 months postpartum.

Just under half the women in the study had regular time for themselves at least once a week. However, 1 in 6 women reported that they never had any time for themselves. The prevalence of depressive symptoms steadily decreased as the frequency of time for self increased (see figure).

Activities commonly reported by women when they had time to themselves were: going out with their partner, having a long bath or shower, going to the hairdresser, or putting their feet up and reading a book or watching TV. The most commonly reported activity was doing the supermarket shopping. We suspect that what women actually do when they have time to themselves may not matter so much as that someone else looks after their baby for a while—meaning that they get a break from that responsibility.

The findings suggest that supporting new mothers to get time for themselves weekly, in the first six months after birth may be a relatively simple way to reduce rates of postnatal depression. However, it may not be straightforward for all mothers to get this time. It requires the ongoing support of partners, family, and/or friends. These significant others can play an important role in encouraging women to take time for themselves, and helping to look after the baby for a period of time. The more we can share the demands of looking after a new baby, the healthier mothers will be.


Participants in the Maternal Health Study

1507 women joined the study between 2003 and 2005. We are delighted that 1,172 (78%) of you are still involved in the study. Amazing!

Ten year follow-up questionnaires: We are three quarters of the way through inviting women to take part in the ten year follow-up. So far, we’ve had 729 questionnaires returned. That is 82% of women invited to take part so far. Thank you!

Face to Face Visits with mothers and ten year olds: To date 402 mothers and their oldest child have completed Face to Face interviews, and 54 mothers have completed the online option. That is 69% of mothers who have been invited to participate so far. We are enjoying the opportunity to meet so many mothers and children in the study. Again, thank you!
What do the children do at the Face to Face visit?

One of the children who participated in the Face to Face visits wrote in their feedback to us, that they’d somehow like to show their mum what they’d done. So, here’s bit of a rundown on the activities we ask the ten/eleven year old children to do during their Face to Face visit.

With a Maternal Health Study researcher, children are asked to do some problem solving activities on the computer, such as quickly choosing whether two pictures are the same or different. They also play memory games, such as ordering pictures from smallest to largest (see pictures below).

Children also do activities on the iPad. These involve listening to, and repeating, different sentences and choosing which one of four pictures best describes a word. Children also have their height, weight and blood pressure measured. The final activities involve looking at differences in picture patterns, and asking them to describe the meaning of words. We’ve had really great feedback from the children who have participated in the Face to Face visit so far.

“Thank you, it was FUN!!!!” “The best things about the interview were the computer games.”

“Most of the things were fun, especially the memory game.” “Everyone was very friendly.”

“I enjoyed the interview. It was new so I was a bit shy, but I overcame it.”

“I think I actually made a new friend.”

If you would like to know about Maternal Health Study publications or other study information please go to: https://www.mcri.edu.au/research/projects/maternal-health-study or contact us using the details listed below.

Wishing you all a happy new year and safe holiday season.

Staying in touch

We’re keen to keep in touch with you and, as you know, we have an ongoing process of contacting you by phone, email or mail to ensure we have your current contact details. If you have moved house or your details have changed in some way, please tell us so we can keep you up to date with the Maternal Health Study news, and so you receive information about the 10 year follow-up.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUING SUPPORT OF THE STUDY

Please feel free to contact us anytime:
Ann Krastev (03) 9936 6707  ann.krastev@mcri.edu.au
Monique Seymour (03) 9936 6091  monique.seymour@mcri.edu.au
Sue Perlen (03) 9936 6613  susan.perlen@mcri.edu.au
Or send a text message to MHS mobile: 0467 588 828 or email mhs10interviews@mcri.edu.au