

New mums beat the blues and increase wellbeing with physio exercise, study reveals

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In a world first study of its kind, 161 postnatal women with no previous depressive symptoms were divided in two separate groups to test the effect of a physiotherapist-led exercise and education program on wellbeing.

The experimental group received an eight-week "Mother and Baby" program, including specialized exercises provided by a women's health physiotherapist combined with parenting education.

In the second group, "Education Only" participants only received the written educational material.

The participants of both groups were assessed for psychological wellbeing (using the Positive Affect Balance Scale), depressive symptoms (using the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale) and physical activity levels at baseline, after completing the program at eight weeks and then four weeks after completion.

Study coordinator, Ms Emily Norman of the University of Melbourne's [Physiotherapy](#) Department and women's health physiotherapist at the Angliss Hospital, Ferntree Gully, Melbourne says, "There were significant improvements in wellbeing scores and [depressive symptoms](#) in the "Mother and Baby" group compared with the "Education Only" group over the study period."

"This positive effect continued four weeks after completion of the

program," she says.

"The number of women identified as "at risk" for postnatal depression pre-intervention was reduced by 50% in the Mother and Baby group by the end of the intervention."

Professor Mary Galea, of the University's Physiotherapy Department and senior author of the study says, "By improving new mothers' wellbeing, this physiotherapy-based program has been shown to have a real impact on reducing the risk of PND."

"However, further study is needed to explore whether the intervention effects and improved well being are maintained beyond the first three months," she says.

[Postnatal Depression](#) is a major health issue affecting up to 13% of all new [mothers](#) throughout the world, with most cases commencing in the first three months of the postnatal period.

The study was published in the March issue of *Physical Therapy*, the scientific journal of the American Physical Therapy Association.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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