

Young dads at high risk of depression, too

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Depression can hit young fathers hard—with symptoms increasing dramatically during some of the most important years of their children's lives, a new Northwestern Medicine study has found.

Depressive symptoms increased on average by 68 percent over the first five years of [fatherhood](#) for these [young men](#), who were around 25 years old when they became fathers and whom lived in the same home as their [children](#). The results of the study were published April 14 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

This study is the first to identify when young fathers are at increased risk of developing [depressive symptoms](#). Craig Garfield, M.D., lead author of the paper, said the results of this [longitudinal study](#) are significant and could lead to more effective interventions and treatment for young men early in the fatherhood years.

"It's not just new moms who need to be screened for [depression](#), dads are at risk, too," Garfield said. "Parental depression has a detrimental effect on kids, especially during those first key years of parent-infant attachment. We need to do a better job of helping young dads transition through that time period."

Garfield is an associate professor in pediatrics and medical social sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and a pediatrician at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital and Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

Previous research has shown depressed dads will use more corporal punishment, read less and interact less with their children, and are more likely to be stressed and neglect their children. Compared to the children of non-depressed dads, these children are at risk for having poor language and reading development and more behavior problems and conduct disorders.

"We knew paternal depression existed and the detrimental effects it has on children, but we did not know where to focus our energy and our attention until this study," Garfield said. "This is a wakeup call for anyone who knows a young man who has recently become a new father. Be aware of how he is doing during his transition into fatherhood. If he is feeling extreme anxiety or blues, or not able to enjoy things in life as he previously did, encourage him to get help."

This paper used data collected from 10,623 young men enrolled in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). It includes a nationally representative sample of adolescents in the U.S. and follows them in several waves over nearly 20 years into young adulthood. All participants' [symptoms of depression](#) were scored at each wave through a survey using a subset of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale.

During the most recent wave of the Add Health study, the young men were age 24 to 32, and 33 percent had become fathers.

The majority of these fathers lived in the same home as their children. Young fathers who did not live with their children did not experience such a dramatic increase in depressive symptom scores in early fatherhood, the study found. Instead, these non-residential fathers' depression symptom scores were elevated before fatherhood and start to decrease during early fatherhood, though this sample is smaller in number. Residential fathers' depression symptom scores were lower

before fatherhood and then dramatically increased after the birth of a child and into early fatherhood.

Provided by Northwestern University

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