

# New intervention helps mothers address depression

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Researchers at UC Davis have developed a new intervention that identifies potentially depressed mothers and encourages them to seek treatment. The Motivating our Mothers (MOM) program takes a unique approach, relying on pediatricians rather than the mother's doctor for diagnosis. In the study, mothers were given a short survey to assess whether they needed additional care. Those who identified depression symptoms were then coached by a research assistant to seek further help.

The program had a remarkable impact. Nearly 74 percent of [mothers](#) in the intervention group sought additional help, compared to around 54 percent in the [control group](#). The research was published recently in the journal *Academic Pediatrics*.

"This is one of the first studies to take on the role of the pediatrician in not only identifying [depression](#) in mothers but also helping them take the next step," said Erik Fernandez y Garcia, associate professor of clinical pediatrics and lead author on the study. "The hope is that once we've refined the intervention and presented it to pediatricians, they will feel more comfortable about addressing depression with mothers of their patients."

The study targeted English-speaking mothers, with children between 0 and 12 years, who were given a simple, two-question survey about the core [symptoms of depression](#). Mothers who showed symptoms received targeted education that focused on removing the stigma associated with depression and how treatment could improve their children's health.

They also received follow-up calls two days later to reinforce the message.

The researchers set a high bar for success, using an active control group that was also screened for depression and given depression education and advice. However, the control intervention lacked the targeted messaging designed to destigmatize depression and link treatment to improved child health.

Pediatricians may be the ideal conduits to help depressed mothers seek care, according to Fernandez y Garcia. Many [young mothers](#) rarely visit their own physicians but make frequent trips to the [pediatrician's](#) office - multiple times during a child's first two years and once a year after that.

In addition to having more opportunities, pediatricians may also be more effective at broaching the subject, as they can better explain how seeking treatment improves children's health.

"Pediatricians are in a position to talk to moms about the effects of depression on their children and use that as a motivation to get their symptoms evaluated," said Fernandez y Garcia.

In some ways, the MOM intervention was even more effective than the researchers had expected. For example, many mothers sought care from a number of different sources simultaneously, including spiritual counselors and mental health and medical practitioners.

The next step is to refine the program and conduct a similar study including Spanish-speaking mothers.

"If I can give pediatricians an efficient [intervention](#) to implement in their practices, we can really increase our ability to identify women with depression," said Fernandez y Garcia. "We can help them feel better and

the kids will have better outcomes as well, so it has a positive effect on everybody's well being."

Provided by UC Davis

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