

## Social mums beat the blues

September 29 2015, by Magen Seymour-Smith

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Good social support for mums - before and after birth - prevents mental health decline.

New mums are at lower risk of postnatal depression if they stay connected with their important social networks.

That's the central finding from a study by Magen Seymour-Smith of The University of Queensland School of Psychology.

"The period after a woman gives birth is a time of significant identity change," Ms Seymour-Smith said.

"We studied 1084 Australian women who gave birth over a 10-year

period and surveyed them at two points in time.

"The first survey was completed in the year before they had a baby and the second between one and 12 months after childbirth.

"Analysis revealed that mothers with high levels of [social support](#) before birth were protected against mental health decline – but only if they kept a similar amount of support afterwards."

Mothers who lost some of their previously high social support network had a higher risk of [mental health](#) decline.

Ms Seymour-Smith will present on the topic tomorrow at the Australian Psychological Society Annual Conference on the Gold Coast.

Her presentation, A lot to lose, will take place at 3.45pm at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre.

"Becoming a mother for the first time can be an exciting and wonderful time," Ms Seymour-Smith said.

"However, for some women the arrival of the 'bundle of joy' is an overwhelming life transition that leaves them feeling afraid, anxious and alone.

"Why do some women embrace parenthood and seemingly thrive in their new roles, but others develop severe mental illness during this time of life transition?

"This is the focus of our current research."

Postnatal depression is estimated to affect 10-20 per cent of first-time mothers.

Symptoms can include severely depressed mood, anxiety, fatigue, compulsive thoughts, loss of control, feelings of inadequacy, irrational fears and an inability to cope.

**More information:** Antenatal risk factors for postnatal depression: a large prospective study. *J Affect Disord.* 2008 May;108(1-2):147-57. Epub 2007 Dec 18. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18067974](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18067974)

Provided by University of Queensland

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