

# Maternal depression may alter stress and immune markers in children

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Credit: George Hodan/Public Domain

New research suggests that depression in women may affect their children's stress and physical well-being throughout life.

For the *Depression & Anxiety* study, researchers followed 125 children from birth to 10 years. At 10 years, mothers' and children's cortisol (CT) and secretory immunoglobulin (s-IgA)—markers of [stress](#) and the

immune system—were measured, mother-child interaction were observed, mothers and children underwent psychiatric diagnoses, and children's externalizing and internalizing symptoms were reported.

Depressed mothers had higher CT and s-IgA levels and displayed more negative parenting, characterized by negative affect, intrusion, and criticism. Children of [depressed mothers](#) tended to exhibit certain psychiatric disorders, have higher s-IgA levels, and display greater social withdrawal.

"Following mothers and children across the first decade of life, we found that exposure to maternal depression impairs functioning of the child's immune system and [stress response](#). Such disruptions to the child's stress and immune system, in turn, led to greater child psychopathology," said senior author Dr. Ruth Feldman, of the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, in Israel.

"We also found that the impairments to the child's stress response and immunity were shaped by similar effects of the depression on the mothers' stress and immune system and their consequent impact on reducing the quality of maternal caregiving. Our findings show the complex effects of maternal depression on [children](#)'s physiology, health, and psychopathology and advocate the need for early interventions that specifically target [maternal stress](#) and enhance parenting behavior."

**More information:** *Depression & Anxiety*,  
[onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/da.22818](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/da.22818)

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