

Poor mental and physical health in pregnancy linked to infant sleep problems

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Severe and persistent infant sleep problems in the first year are linked to poor maternal mental and physical health during pregnancy, a new study by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute has found.

The study, led by Dr. Fallon Cook, found that it's very common to experience difficulties with infant sleep at some point in the first year, with about 60 percent of [mothers](#) reporting mild or fluctuating problems. But for 20 percent of mothers their [infants sleep problems](#) are both persistent and severe during the first year.

"These mothers were more likely to have poorer mental and [physical health](#) during [pregnancy](#) in comparison to mothers of infants with no sleep problems," Dr. Cook says.

The findings show that for some, infant sleep problems may have more to do with mother's wellbeing during pregnancy than with parenting style.

Until now it was unclear whether it was possible to predict which infants will have sleep problems. The current findings, along with other emerging research, suggest that severe and persistent infant sleep problems are linked somehow to mothers' wellbeing during pregnancy.

Dr. Cook says this is an important finding because parents of sleep-disturbed infants often feel severely fatigued, depressed and anxious, and worry they are doing something to cause their infants sleep problems.

"Our findings suggest some infants may be predisposed to have sleep problems, despite parent's best efforts to help their [infant sleep](#) better," she says.

"Identifying and supporting mothers with poor mental and physical health during pregnancy is crucial. These mothers may benefit from more intensive support once the child is born.

"Parenting an infant who isn't sleeping well is extremely hard. It's

important that parents seek help from their GP or child health nurse if feeling depressed, anxious or exhausted, and reach out to family, friends, and local parenting groups for additional support."

The study was published in the latest *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, and followed 1460 women at 15 weeks gestation, and when their infants were three, six, nine and 12 months old.

More information: Fallon Cook et al. Profiles and Predictors of Infant Sleep Problems Across the First Year, *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1097/DBP.0000000000000733](https://doi.org/10.1097/DBP.0000000000000733)

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

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