

Mood matters: New app empowers moms to manage mental wellbeing

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Up to one in five expectant or new mothers will experience perinatal anxiety or depression. Credit: Unsplash - Liv Bruce

Having a baby can be one of life's most exciting and rewarding experiences, but for a new mum it can also be an emotional

rollercoaster—sometimes you're up, and other times you're down.

Recognising the symptoms of maternal anxiety and [depression](#) can be difficult, but with the help of a new app—developed by the University of South Australia and parent support group Village Foundation—thousands of [women](#) will be empowered to monitor their [mental health](#), both during pregnancy and after birth.

The new [YourTime app](#) responds to priorities in perinatal mental health by providing a digitalized tool that enables women to self-monitor and track their mood during pregnancy and early mothering, helping them to recognise early signs of deteriorating mental wellbeing, or conversely acknowledge they're doing well.

It is the first evidence-based app to help women track their own mental wellbeing throughout pregnancy and after birth.

In Australia, up to one in five expectant or new mothers will experience perinatal anxiety or depression, with the illness affecting about 100,000 families each year.

Lead researcher and midwife, UniSA's Associate Professor Lois McKellar, says the new app will provide immediate support for women who may be struggling with low mood, or beginning to experience anxiety, and depression.

"It's natural for women to worry about the impending arrival of a new baby—they're bringing a new life into the world, and they're unsure about the changes that this little baby will bring," Assoc Prof McKellar says.

"It's also very common for new mothers to experience what is often called the 'baby blues' - being a little teary or anxious in the immediate

days and weeks after the baby's birth.

"But if these feelings start to cause concern or stop a new or expectant mum from functioning normally, she may be experiencing perinatal anxiety or depression.

"The YourTime app will help a woman keep track of how she's feeling during pregnancy and motherhood, enabling her quickly recognise any changes in mood, behaviours or feelings.

"Guided by a midwife avatar, women will be able to monitor their wellbeing over time, access education and support materials, as well as connect to other women and mothers via a networking forum.

"Importantly, it puts the woman in control, empowering her to be more aware of her thoughts and feelings."

The app is based on [scientific evidence](#) and has been designed with input from mothers to ensure it is appealing and appropriate for today's women. Using a contemporary, easy-to-use design, it offers a de-medicalised approach to wellbeing and encourages women to think more about their mental health.

Prof McKellar says the YourTime app hopes to prevent women and mothers from slipping between the gaps, especially when their focus is on supporting their new baby.

"A generation ago, post-natal depression was often brushed off as the 'baby blues', even when it was actually something more," Prof McKellar says.

"Now, people are more aware of perinatal depression and anxiety, but the supports are not always available at their fingertips.

"This app will ensure women feel connected, supported and informed at any time of the day or night—even at a midnight feeding—which makes it an extremely appealing tool to support mental health and wellbeing."

A prototype version of the YourTime will soon be available for trial.

More information: yourtimeinc.com/

Provided by University of South Australia

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