

# Talk therapy for mothers with postpartum depression may lead to positive changes in infant brain development

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Researchers from McMaster University have found that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) provided to mothers with postpartum

depression (PPD) by public health nurses may lead to adaptive changes in brain development for their infants.

Researchers, led by Ryan Van Lieshout, found a significant increase in infant high frequency-heart rate variability—a measurement of how well the body manages stress and other emotions. This is the first time anyone has shown in a clinical trial that any type of psychotherapy delivered to mothers with PPD by nurses may lead to adaptive changes in the brains and bodies of infants.

The research has been [published](#) in *Development and Psychopathology*.

The study found significant improvements in PPD symptoms in mothers during the nine-week group intervention. The latest study supports previous research led by Van Lieshout and [published in July 2023](#), which showed the benefits of group CBT led by public health nurses for mothers.

The results of this study suggest that an acceptable, cost-effective talking treatment for PPD delivered by public health nurses has the potential to improve [maternal depression](#) and may even interrupt the intergenerational transmission of psychiatric risk, improving offspring outcomes for mothers and their infants.

**More information:** Bahar Amani et al, Public health nurse-delivered cognitive behavioral therapy for postpartum depression: Assessing the effects of maternal treatment on infant emotion regulation, *Development and Psychopathology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1017/S0954579423001566](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579423001566)

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