

## Why It's Okay To Feel Down

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1300 24 23 22  
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**At some point, your breastfeeding journey will come to an end. Experiencing a wide range of emotions, from melancholy and anxiety to despair or even depression, is common during the weaning process.**

### Mumma, You're Not Alone

This experience is known as post-weaning depression, and it's a reality that many mothers encounter, yet it is still a maternal mental health topic that we do not often acknowledge or talk about.

In this guide, we aim to shed light on this delicate period as your breastfeeding journey comes to an end, validate the feelings and symptoms that you may experience, and provide strategies to help mothers navigate this temporary phase.

Post-weaning depression is a term used to describe the emotional disturbance that can occur after a mother stops breastfeeding.

It is distinct from postpartum depression, which typically manifests within the first year after giving birth. While postpartum depression is widely recognised and discussed, post-weaning depression often flies under the radar, leaving many mothers feeling isolated and confused about their experiences and symptoms.

It is important to note that post-weaning depression symptoms can be very similar to [postpartum depression symptoms](#), making it crucial to understand and address them properly.

Post-weaning depression is characterised by a range of emotional, psychological, and physical symptoms that will arise due to changes in your hormones and adjustments to your routine once you stop breastfeeding.

### It's Okay to Feel Down—Here's Why

As a society, we often celebrate the end of breastfeeding as a milestone, a moment of newfound freedom and independence for mothers.

However, this fails to acknowledge the complex emotions that many women have to navigate during this period or take into consideration why a mother has stopped breastfeeding. It may have been your decision that it was time to stop,

your breast milk supply dropped, you experienced symptoms of anxiety and stress when breastfeeding, or maybe breastfeeding just didn't quite work out for you and your baby. Whatever your reason, it's helpful to recognise that changes to your emotions, feeling physically different, or even showing signs of poor mental health after weaning are a valid and natural response and can happen to any mother.

Societal pressures to breastfeed and stigma surrounding maternal mental health can often intensify these feelings. This can leave mothers struggling with feelings of self-doubt and a sense of failure. However, it's important to understand and acknowledge that these emotions do not reflect your abilities as a parent or the love you have for your child.

They are proof of the deep bond that breastfeeding fosters and the emotional investment that comes with nurturing a baby.

### Key highlight

Feeling down after weaning is normal.

If you're feeling sad, irritable, or just not like yourself after stopping breastfeeding, know that you're not alone. Many moms go through this and it's called post-weaning depression. It's okay to not feel okay right now.

### Post-weaning depression is common during the weaning process.

While precise statistics around post-weaning depression are lacking, informal evidence and personal accounts from mothers worldwide highlight how common it actually is.

From mummy bloggers sharing their experiences online to community groups and forums, countless women have bravely opened up about their struggles, maternal mental health, and symptoms of post-weaning depression, shedding light on this phase of the postpartum journey that many women will go through.



### Decoding your emotions

It's crucial to differentiate post-weaning depression from the "baby blues" or even general sadness that many mothers experience after giving birth.

Baby blues typically involves mood swings, tearfulness, and feelings of overwhelm or anxiety, with the symptoms being short-lived and usually resolved within a few weeks. Post-weaning depression, on the other hand, can be more persistent and severe, with symptoms lasting for several weeks or even months.

Symptoms of post-weaning depression may include:

- Persistent sadness or feelings of emptiness: You may find yourself crying more often or feeling a sense of emptiness or loss.
- Irritability and mood swings: You may experience sudden mood shifts, feeling irritable or angry one moment and tearful the next.
- Loss of interest or pleasure: Activities or hobbies that once brought you joy may no longer seem enjoyable or fulfilling.
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt: You may struggle with self-doubt, feeling like you're not a good enough parent or person, or feeling guilty that you could not provide for your child.
- Fatigue and sleep disturbances: You may feel constantly tired or have trouble sleeping, even when your baby is sleeping through the night.

If these symptoms persist for more than a few weeks and interfere with your daily life or ability to care for yourself and your child or children, it's essential to seek professional help. Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

**ForWhen** can assist you in navigating these emotions and help you find the right support for you: **1300 24 23 22.**

## Your Body, Your Hormones, and Maternal Mental Health

To better understand the emotions associated with post-weaning depression, it's useful to recognise the shifts in your hormones that occur when breastfeeding ends. During lactation, hormones like prolactin, oxytocin, and oestrogen play a significant role in regulating mood and emotional well-being.

- **Prolactin:** This hormone is responsible for stimulating milk production and is associated with feelings of calmness and relaxation. When breastfeeding stops, prolactin levels drop, potentially contributing to mood disturbances.
- **Oxytocin:** Often referred to as the “tend-and-befriend hormone,” oxytocin promotes bonding and feelings of attachment. When you stop breastfeeding, it can lead to a decrease in oxytocin levels, potentially affecting mood and emotional regulation.
- **Oestrogen:** Oestrogen levels tend to be lower during breastfeeding and may fluctuate as milk production decreases. These hormonal shifts can contribute to mood changes and emotional instability.

Understanding the role of hormones in post-weaning depression can help mothers navigate this phase with greater self-compassion and awareness. It's important to remember that these hormonal fluctuations and the symptoms that follow are natural and temporary, and with the right support and coping strategies, the impact on your mental health as well as your relationships can be managed effectively.



## Mum-Tested Coping Strategies

While post-weaning depression can be challenging, there are various coping strategies that other mothers have found helpful in managing their emotions during this transition. Here are some tried-and-true tips:

### Establish a self-care routine

Dedicating time for self-care is crucial during this sensitive period. Allocate a specific time each day, even if it's just 15-20 minutes, to engage in activities that nourish your mind, body, and soul. This could be as simple as taking a warm bath, practicing gentle stretches, or enjoying a cup of herbal tea in a quiet space.

### Keep a mood journal

Tracking your mental state can be a powerful tool for identifying triggers or patterns that may be linked to psychological downswings. Consider keeping a mood journal where you can record your feelings, thoughts, and any notable events or circumstances that may have influenced your mood. Over time, this can provide valuable insights and help you develop personalised coping strategies.

### Find your mum tribe

Having a network of other mothers who understand what you're going through can be incredibly therapeutic. Seek out local mum groups, online forums, or social media communities where you can connect with others navigating similar experiences. Sharing your struggles and triumphs with like-minded individuals can help you feel less isolated and more understood.

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### Mind boosting snacks

Nutrition and your diet have been shown to have mood-boosting properties. Incorporating a balanced and nutritious diet can provide a natural boost during this period. Consider snacking on dark chocolate, which is rich in mood-enhancing compounds like tryptophan and serotonin. Berries, nuts, and seeds are also excellent options, as they contain essential nutrients that can positively impact your overall well-being.

### Exercise, even if it's just a little

Regular physical activity has been proven to have a positive impact on mood and mental health. Even if you can't commit to a structured workout routine, aim for small bursts of movement throughout the day. A brisk walk around the block with your baby, a few simple stretches, or a short yoga session can help release endorphins and improve your overall sense of well-being.

### Stay connected with your partner

Open communication with your partner about the challenges you're facing is crucial during this time. Share your feelings openly and honestly, and encourage your partner to be patient and understanding. Requesting small gestures from your partner, such as offering words of encouragement, lending a listening ear, or taking on additional responsibilities at home, can go a long way in strengthening your bond and providing the help you need during such a delicate time.

### Try mindfulness and meditation

Incorporating mindfulness and meditation practices into your daily routine can help build a sense of calm and clarity. Consider trying a guided meditation app or attending a local mindfulness class. Even dedicating just 5–10 minutes each day to deep breathing exercises or mindful reflection can have a profound impact on your overall well-being.



### Celebrate small wins

During this challenging time, it's essential to acknowledge and celebrate even the smallest of victories. Whether it's a day when you felt a little more energised, a moment of laughter with your baby, or a task you accomplished despite feeling overwhelmed, take the time to recognise and reward these small wins. This can help grow a sense of positivity and remind you of your strength and resilience.

### Establish a bedtime routine

Prioritising quality sleep is crucial for hormonal balance and your overall well-being. Establish a consistent bedtime routine that promotes relaxation and restful sleep. This could involve taking a warm bath, practicing gentle stretches, or engaging in a calming activity like reading or journaling. Creating a sleep-friendly environment by minimising distractions, such as your phone, and ensuring a comfortable temperature can also contribute to better sleep quality.

### Key highlight

Be kind to yourself and lean on others.

Eat yummy, healthy snacks, move your body in ways that feel good and do things that make you happy. Don't be afraid to ask for help from your loved ones or other moms who understand what you're going through.

### Delegate and share responsibilities.

As a mother, it's easy to feel overwhelmed with the demands of looking after your baby and possible other children and household responsibilities. During this phase, it's important to ask for help, share the load, and delegate tasks whenever possible.

The people around you are only too happy to help with childcare, household chores, or running errands. Leaning on your village will provide you with much-needed breaks and opportunities to focus on your own physical and mental well-being.

### Create a “Happy Playlist”

Music has a profound ability to influence our emotions and moods. Consider creating a playlist of uplifting, feel-good songs that resonate with you. Whenever you’re feeling down or in need of a mood boost, put on your “happy playlist” and allow the music to lift your spirits and provide a temporary escape from your worries.

### Aromatherapy and essential oils

Certain essential oils, such as lavender, bergamot, and ylang-ylang, are known for their calming and mood-enhancing properties. Consider incorporating aromatherapy into your daily routine by using an essential oil diffuser, adding a few drops to your bath, or applying a diluted blend to pulse points. The soothing aromas can help promote relaxation and stability in your emotions.

### Schedule alone time

While it may seem counterintuitive, allocating dedicated alone time can be an incredibly beneficial form of therapy as you get through this sensitive journey. And no, time to do the household chores by yourself is not what we mean when we say ‘alone time’!

It’s ok to arrange for someone to take over childcare responsibilities for a little while so you can take time to indulge in a leisurely activity. Alone time provides an opportunity for self-reflection, relaxation, and recharging. Remember, taking time for yourself is not selfish; it’s a necessary investment in your overall health and ability to be the best parent you can be.



### How Partners and Kids Can Support Mum

While Mum is trying to navigate her post-weaning depression, it’s essential for partners, older children, and family members to understand and assist her during this challenging time. Here are some ways they can offer assistance:

- Be patient and understanding. Recognise that the emotions your partner or mother is experiencing are valid and not a reflection of her love for you or the family.
- Offer a listening ear. Sometimes, simply being present and allowing her to express her feelings without judgement can be incredibly comforting.
- Assist with household tasks: Offer to take on additional responsibilities, such as meal preparation, cleaning, or childcare duties, to alleviate some of the burdens on the mother.
- Encourage personal wellness: Gently encourage your partner or mother to prioritise herself through activities she enjoys and remind her that taking time for herself is essential for her well-being.
- Provide words of affirmation: Offer words of encouragement, praise, and reassurance, reminding her of her strength and the positive impact she has on the family.
- Suggest professional help: If you notice persistent or severe symptoms, gently discuss options with your partner or mother to seek professional help from a therapist, counsellor, or healthcare provider.

Remember, supporting a loved one through post-weaning depression requires patience, empathy, and a willingness to lend a helping hand in whatever way possible. By working together as a family, you can create a nurturing and supportive environment that fosters healing and emotional well-being.

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## Professional Help: It's Okay to Ask

While many mothers may find relief through self-care strategies and by receiving help and acknowledgement from loved ones, there are times when professional help is needed.

If you experience persistent or severe symptoms of post-weaning depression, such as feelings of hopelessness, thoughts of self-harm, or an inability to care for yourself or your child or children, it's crucial to seek professional assistance.

Supporting women's mental health during and after the post-weaning period is essential to ensuring their well-being and emotional stability. Consulting with a mental health professional, such as a therapist, psychologist, counsellor, or perinatal mental health nurse or midwife, can provide you with the tools and help needed to navigate the symptoms you are experiencing during your post-weaning journey effectively.

Professionals can offer guidance on coping strategies, provide a safe space to process your emotions through talk therapy, and, if necessary, recommend appropriate treatment options, including medication or alternative therapy services. **ForWhen (1300 24 23 22)** can help find the right service for you.

Remember, seeking professional help is a sign of strength, not weakness. It demonstrates your commitment to prioritising your mental health and well-being, which ultimately benefits not only you but also your family.

### Key highlight

Getting help is a sign of strength, if you're still feeling down after a few weeks or if it's really impacting your life, it's important to talk to a professional.

Asking for help is brave, and it shows how much you care about yourself and your family.

## The Final Word: Post-Weaning Down Days Don't Define You

Post-weaning depression is a real and valid experience that many mothers face, yet it

remains an often-undiscussed topic of the postpartum journey.

It's important to remember that the ups and downs experienced during your post-weaning journey do not define you as a parent or a person. The emotions experienced and displayed are a natural response to the profound physical and mental changes that occur during the weaning process.

By acknowledging and accepting your feelings, practicing self-compassion, and seeking help when needed, you can navigate this transition with grace and resilience. You are not alone in this journey, and countless other mothers have walked this path before you.

If you find yourself struggling with post-weaning depression, know that help and resources are available. Reach out to your healthcare provider, connect with like-minded groups, or seek professional counselling.

Check out the [Australian Breastfeeding Association](#) who have some great resources and support for your breastfeeding journey. Your mental well-being is just as important as your physical health, and prioritising time to look after yourself during this phase is essential for you and your family.

Embrace the ups and downs of this journey and remember that the hard days are temporary. With time, patience, and the right group of people and professionals around you, you will emerge stronger, more resilient, and better equipped to embrace the next chapter of your journey as a mother.

ForWhen is just a call away, ready to listen and connect you with the right local mental health supports that suit your needs, no matter where you are in your pregnancy or first 12 months. Call 1300 24 23 22 to talk to a navigator.

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