

# Pregnancy and New Mothers



## Background

- Giving birth for the first time can be a traumatic experience. Having knowledge of the possible challenges and strong social supports can soften the trauma.
- In first country, knowledge and social supports are most often provided by the extended family and informal networks. Newcomers to Toronto are less likely to have extended families and informal social networks.
- Depression twice as common in women as men during the childbearing years. Postpartum depression occurs within 1 year of childbirth.
- Risk factors for post-partum depression are: depression or anxiety during pregnancy, stressful recent life events, poor social support and a previous history of depression.
- Toronto Public Health offers free, multilingual, telephone advice to new parents regardless of their residency status.
- On request, Public Health nurses will visit the homes of new mothers. A family home visitor (peer health worker) will visit the parent on an ongoing basis as needed.

## Research:

- A study of 1518 first time mothers who gave birth at ten Toronto hospitals found that 62.3% of the mothers surveyed were born outside of Canada; 33.6% (of the 1,516) were recent immigrants who lived in Canada five years or less. These mothers are also transitioning into motherhood in a new country.

## Typical Issues

- Mother is exhausted, overwhelmed, and unaware of community resources. Risk of post partum depression is elevated.
- Mother may be seeking support over the phone from extended family in first country but is not part of support networks in Toronto.
- The mother is isolated at home with the baby and not accessing mother/baby community programs.

## Advocacy Hints:

- Now, a visit by a Public Health nurse is available on request. In addition to the nurse, a Family Home Visitor (peer health worker) can visit on an ongoing basis. Family Home Visitor comes from multi-cultural backgrounds to match mothers' cultural preferences.

## TPH Services

- **Prenatal program:**
  - Healthiest Babies Possible Program (HBP)
  - Growing Healthy together prenatal program
  - Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)
- **Postpartum program:**
  - Healthy Baby Healthy Children (HBHC)
- **Parenting programs:**
  - Living and learning with Baby (6 weeks -6 months)
  - Make the connection (infants 6 weeks -12 months)
  - Nobody's Perfect (18 months-6 years)
  - The Incredible Years (2-6years)

# Healthiest Babies Possible Prenatal Program

A FREE prenatal nutrition program for high risk pregnant women  
to reduce low birthweight in infants.

## Who is at Risk?

Pregnant women may be at risk of giving birth to a low birthweight baby  
if they have one or more of the following:

- severe financial problems
- inadequate diets
- problems with weight
- problems with tobacco, alcohol or drug use
- illness during pregnancy
- lack of support/isolation
- closely spaced pregnancies
- inadequate prenatal care
- pregnancy complications
- a high level of stress



## Services Provided:

- Individual nutrition counselling with a Registered Dietitian
- Food certificates given for healthy food and vitamin supplements if eligible
- Referrals to Public Health Nursing
- Health education and support in a culturally sensitive manner
- Referral to appropriate prenatal and postnatal resources or services, as needed
- Over 65 locations serving all communities in the City of Toronto

## Who is eligible?

- Women must be less than 28 weeks (7 months) pregnant
- Women living in the City of Toronto
- At risk women meeting eligibility criteria for the HBP Program

Referrals are welcome from all sources.

Call 416-338-7600

# Are you 3 to 6 months pregnant?

Toronto Public Health  
has a  
**NEW** program  
for you



## Having a Baby, Becoming a Parent Prenatal Program

### **FREE**

Bring your partner or support person

Weekday evenings 7:00-9:00 p.m.  
for 4 weeks

Locations across the city

Learn about:

- having a healthy pregnancy
- breastfeeding
- becoming a parent
- basic labour and birth information

Register to start the program before the end of your 6<sup>th</sup> month

To find out more and to register, call **416-338-7600**

 **TORONTO** Public Health

## Depression and Anxiety After Birth

A woman may have many different feelings after her baby is born. Some of these feelings are joy and excitement, or guilt and sadness. This is quite normal after such an important event! Sometimes unhappy feelings become so difficult that a mother feels overwhelmed and out of control. If this happens, a woman may be suffering from postpartum depression and anxiety.

### What are Postpartum Depression and Anxiety?

They are emotional problems which may happen to a mother after her baby is born. One mother in five experiences depression or anxiety. These problems are more common than many people think. Every mother is different and may have different symptoms. These symptoms may happen shortly after birth or many months later.

### What are the Symptoms?

Most women feel:

- sad
- angry
- guilty
- alone
- worried
- inadequate
- irritable

Other feelings are:

- wanting to run away
- not being able to cope
- exhaustion – not being able to sleep even when the baby sleeps
- isolation

A mother who is new to Canada may also feel:

- lonely because her family and friends are far away
- unfamiliar with the Canadian healthcare system
- the absence of familiar comforts, traditions and rituals

These feelings last for two weeks or more, and do not go away by themselves. This is a different situation than the “baby blues” (fatigue and tearfulness). The “baby blues” may appear shortly after birth and disappear on their own.

A mother may have “scary” thoughts of harming the baby or herself. These thoughts may increase if the mother is overtired or stressed. A doctor should be consulted.



## **What Causes Postpartum Depression and Anxiety?**

The causes are not completely understood.

Some causes may be:

- hormonal and chemical changes in the body
- stress and lack of support
- adjusting to motherhood

A history of emotional, physical or sexual abuse may be a factor.

## **Why Do So Many Women Suffer in Silence?**

- they may hide their feelings
- they may feel ashamed and guilty
- health care professionals may not recognize the depression or anxiety
- partners and families may not take the situation seriously

## **What Can Help?**

- speak to a health care provider, family member, friend or counsellor
- ask for the location of a postpartum support program
- make sure that the mother gets enough food and res
- understand that this is not the mother's fault
- accept and understand that a new mother cannot do everything
- ask for help from others
- be willing to try things that may be unfamiliar such as counselling, group support, or medication
- take one day at a time

**Remember:                      There is help available.                      It won't last forever.**

If you have questions or concerns about your baby, speak with a nurse, Public Health Nurse, your midwife, nurse practitioner, clinic, or doctor.





A black and white photograph of a woman with dark hair, seen from the side, breastfeeding her baby. The woman is wearing a dark, sleeveless top. The baby is lying on its back, and the woman's hands are visible supporting the baby's head and neck. The background is a textured, light-colored surface.

## **Toronto Public Health**

offers the following free services to families to protect, promote and support breastfeeding:

- Telephone Support
- Home Visiting
- Breastfeeding Clinics

Mothers and babies who are experiencing breastfeeding problems or need more information about breastfeeding can call:

**Toronto Public Health**  
**416-338-7600**

Monday to Friday  
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (excluding holidays)  
or visit the website at  
[toronto.ca/health/breastfeeding](http://toronto.ca/health/breastfeeding)

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## Early Identification

Parents and professionals are provided with information and tools to screen children at key points in developmental stages in order to identify progress and delays.

## Parenting Programs

Public Health Nurses, often in partnership with community agencies, provide the following free parenting programs:

**Living and Learning with Baby** (6 weeks – 6 months) is a 5 week group program for new parents that focuses on enhancing parenting capacity, supporting transition to parenthood and building parental support systems.



### Make the Connection

(infants 6 weeks – 12 months) is a parent-infant 9 week interactive program that promotes secure attachment, two-way communication, infant led learning, the importance of early years and the parent-child relationship.

**Nobody's Perfect** (18 months – 6 years) is an 8 week program for parents that uses a participant-centered approach to help parents recognize and build on their strengths and to find positive ways to raise healthy and happy children.

### The Incredible Years

(2 – 6 years) is a 12 week program that teaches parents interactive play, non-violent discipline, logical consequences and problem solving skills. Sessions involve discussions, video tape modeling and role play.

## Peer Nutrition Program (PNP)

The PNP program is aimed at improving the feeding practices and skills of parents/caregivers with children ages 6 months to 6 years. The program reaches the diverse ethnic/cultural communities in Toronto and sessions are lead by trained Community Nutrition Assistants. Support is provided by Registered Dietitians.

## Toronto Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing and Blind-Low Vision Programs

**Preschool Speech and Language Services Program** provides parents and their children with assessment, parent training, caregiver consultation, home programming, individual and group treatment.

### Infant Hearing Program

includes universal hearing screening of all newborns prior to hospital discharge, diagnostic audiology and high risk surveillance; and family support, counselling, information and education.

### Blind-Low Vision Program

provides family support, counselling and early intervention services to children from birth to school entry who are diagnosed with low vision or blindness.



# Programs for pregnant women & families with young children



## Prenatal – 6 years

416.338.7600

[toronto.ca/health](http://toronto.ca/health)

TORONTO  
Public Health



## Toronto Public Health Programs

Positive prenatal and early childhood experiences have a significant impact on subsequent health. The following free programs support healthy birth outcomes and promote optimal early childhood growth and development. A number of programs are provided in English and other languages and are done in partnership with community agencies.

### Healthiest Babies Possible Program (HBP)

The goal of HBP is to reduce the incidence of low birth weight in nutritionally at-risk pregnant women by providing one-to-one nutrition counselling, referrals and food certificates. Services are provided by Registered Dietitians to women less than 28 weeks pregnant at the time of referral.

### Evening Prenatal Program

The "Having a Baby, Becoming a Parent" Prenatal Education Program is a 4 week program for expectant families and is provided in 8 community locations.



## Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) Prenatal to 6 years

The HBHC program provides support to families through the prenatal and postpartum period and through the early childhood years.

### HBHC Prenatal and Homeless At-Risk Prenatal (HARP) Programs

Public Health Nurses provide one-to-one visits to pregnant women who are adolescents (19 years and under) or are 20 – 24 years old with developmental delays, and/or are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The goal of this program is to increase accessibility to prenatal care and community resources.

### HBHC Postpartum Birth to 6 weeks

Public Health Nurses provide telephone counselling and information on resources in the community to families with newborns within 48 hours of hospital discharge. Home visits are provided to consenting families identified as needing support to make a healthy adjustment in the first few weeks of life.

### HBHC Home Visiting 6 weeks to 6 years

Public Health Nurses and Family Home Visitors provide home visiting to identified families whose children are at risk of poor development. This program supports families who would benefit from learning about growth and development, positive parenting and community resources.



### Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)

The goal of CPNP is to reduce the incidence of low birth weight, improve the health of both infant and mother and encourage breastfeeding. Public Health Nurses and Registered Dietitians work with community partners to support at-risk pregnant women in 39 sites in Toronto. Support is provided through group education, individual service, referral and social supports.

### Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding support provides families with information to assist women in making an informed decision about initiating and continuing exclusive breastfeeding to 6 months and beyond. Support is provided through home visits, telephone consultation, breastfeeding clinics and groups.