

## Looking after yourself

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### Your mental health after giving birth

Even the most resilient woman can become emotionally vulnerable after childbirth. For women with HIV, the overwhelming life changes brought about by a new baby can be compounded by anxiety about the future. The joy of giving birth may also be accompanied by self-doubt, exhaustion, and guilt for having any negative feelings.

The constant demands of an infant, together with recovery from childbirth, are very hard to imagine for anyone who has not been responsible for one full-time. If your delivery did not go as planned you may also feel some anger, pain or disappointment about that.

You may also have nagging fears that your child has HIV despite evidence otherwise. This anxiety is very understandable, especially as your baby keeps undergoing testing until 18 months of age. Your paediatrician and HIV doctor need to take time to talk with you about your fears.

Asking for extra help and support from family, friends and from the community sector (both the HIV related support services and those set up for new mothers) does not mean you are 'not coping' – it means you are trying to be the best mother you can be.

If your baby does have HIV you are facing some difficult decisions that place you under extreme stress. You have the right to be upset and to take time to make decisions.

Giving birth changes your life. Many new mothers need to see a mental health professional to help with the adjustment.

You need not experience this alone or feel that something is wrong with you if you are struggling. The ongoing 'burden of secrecy' can be huge and knowing that support is available is important for you, your baby and your family.

One in seven women experience post-natal depression. If post-natal depression occurs, psychotherapy, psychosocial support (support groups) and cognitive-behavioural therapy can all play a role in helping you regain equilibrium. Many women also find antidepressant medication useful.

[Testing your baby for HIV](#) [1][up](#) [2][Menopause](#) [3]

- [ANET resources](#)

#### Links:

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/treat-yourself-right/pregnancy/testing-your-baby-for-hiv>

[2] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/treat-yourself-right/pregnancy>

[3] <http://www.napwa.org.au/resource/treat-yourself-right/menopause>