



You and Your Body in Early Parenthood

Pregnancy and motherhood can be wonderful but challenging; physically, emotionally and psychologically. There are significant changes to the body and new pressures and stressors as you navigate motherhood, be it for the first or fifth time. During this period, some people develop an unhealthy preoccupation with eating, exercise and body weight/shape.

Parenting a baby requires a great deal of time and energy, which will be affected if you are giving time and energy to an eating disorder or disordered eating practices. It is incredibly important to look after yourself as well as your baby. If a mother's nutrition is not sufficient, both mother and baby can be adversely affected.

Women who have previously had an eating disorder are at higher risk of eating issues in the postpartum period, but eating disorders can also develop during this time. Importantly, some women with eating disorders are affected by postnatal depression and anxiety, and it is very important to seek help if you are feeling vulnerable.

There is immense societal pressure on women to lose their pregnancy weight as quickly as possible after their baby has been born. Many women feel they need to start exercising excessively and dieting immediately and this can trigger eating disorder thoughts and behaviours.

Try to take the time to enjoy your baby without focussing on your weight or body shape.

Tips for mums:

- **Appreciate your body**
Be proud of what your body has done, not just what it looks like.
- **Don't buy into unrealistic expectations**
Remember that it took 40 weeks to grow your baby, it may take the same time to recover from pregnancy and settle into your new normal.
- **Feed your body for your baby**
Your baby needs you to be the healthiest version of you. So that you can give your baby the time and energy they need, make sure you look after yourself first.
- **Unhealthy comparisons**
Just as each baby is different, each body is different. Try not to compare yourself to others as no two people are the same.
- **Question what you see in the media**
It is unhelpful to compare yourself to unrealistic post-pregnancy weight loss stories. Likewise, don't follow people on social media if they make you feel bad about yourself, remember they're only showing you what they want to show you.

➤ **Your hunger levels and nutritional requirements may have changed**

You may notice changes in energy levels and feel more tired, dependent on a range of factors. Make sure you're fuelling yourself with a healthy quantity and quality of food. If you're breastfeeding you may need more food and restricting your calorie intake can affect the quantity and quality of your breastmilk.

If you think you are struggling with an eating disorder, disordered eating or body image concerns, please contact us. We offer a safe place for you to seek information, openly discuss your experience and ask any questions you may have.

Getting help

Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV) has a range of services including psychologists, dietician, support groups and the Hub that can offer you support, information and referrals.

Contact us on 1300 550 236 between 9.30am – 4.30pm, Monday – Friday or email edv@eatingdisorders.org.au.