The STRONG MOM Kit for Moms
Having and raising a baby is hard work.

Our STRONG MOM Kit was created for moms with babies like you — to help you manage this big change in your life.

The STRONG MOM Kit can help you learn more about this thing called motherhood, including the myths and realities of being a mom, and common complaints from moms like yourself.

The STRONG MOM Kit also provides information on “baby blues” and postpartum depression — depression that can affect moms after they have a baby.

Finally, this kit provides resources to help moms like you get help if you need it, and tips to stay strong!
Becoming a mother is supposed to be one of the most exciting and joyful experiences for a woman. However, the reality can be quite different. Below are some common myths of motherhood:

**Myth:** Bonding happens naturally and instantly.

**REALITY:** Bonding happens over a lifetime as mother and child grow and change. There is no magic moment at childbirth or in the early infancy stages where this relationship is sealed or broken.

**Myth:** New motherhood will be the happiest time in your life.

**REALITY:** While there will be rewarding moments filled with joy and happiness, child-rearing is a demanding, serious, stressful, complex responsibility that can leave even experienced moms feeling overwhelmed and unprepared.

Motherhood is a 24-hour a day job with no scheduled time off, no training, no feedback, limited rewards and no option to resign. Like anything else, some enjoy the job and some do not. It is perfectly okay to love and adore your baby and still dread the everyday tasks of feeding, changing diapers, etc.

**Myth:** You will never miss your pre-parent life.

**REALITY:** It is normal to mourn the loss of the person you were before you became a mother. Since babies are often called a “new addition”, it’s easy to forget that you will have to make adjustments that include losing the freedom to spend time by yourself. You can no longer quickly and easily run an errand, catch a movie, grab coffee with a friend or even take a shower without first considering the baby’s needs.

**Myth:** Motherhood is totally fulfilling.

**REALITY:** Mothers often think their role is to devote all their time and energy to family, even if it means neglecting their own needs. It’s vital for moms to remember and honor their own goals, thoughts, and emotions.
**Myth:** Breastfeeding is natural, so it’s easy.

**REALITY:** Many, many moms have difficulties with breastfeeding. Why else do you suppose there’s an entire field of lactation consultants dedicated to helping mothers figure it out? Breastfeeding can be frustrating, painful or just not feel right. The ability to breastfeed easily is not a marker of one’s ability to be a good mother.

**Myth:** The relationship with your partner will grow and glow.

**REALITY:** Pregnancy and the first year after child birth is a period of huge role change and other adjustments for both mothers and fathers. Yes, the two of you may form a new, closer bond as parents, but not without work. And, it certainly does not happen naturally. Many women feel very overwhelmed and may feel that her partner is not very helpful, even if he/she is trying his/her best to help and be understanding.

Actually, the first year after having a baby has higher rates of stress and lower satisfaction within the relationship, likely due to the stressors of new parenthood.

**Myth:** Only ‘bad moms’ complain when it’s hard.

**REALITY:** Many women find that motherhood is hard to handle, but downplay the negatives because they are afraid of being labeled as bad mothers. You may feel guilty because you long for some time alone or become frustrated with your child. There is no shame in admitting that being a mother is not easy.

**Myth:** Other moms are your allies.

**REALITY:** Other moms are just as afraid to look like a bad parent, so they also avoid talking about difficulties. Some women judge other moms unkindly and make statements like, "You let him watch that much television?" or "She’s not walking yet?" It is best to avoid regular contact with these types of women. Instead, seek out supportive moms who are more open about their own struggles.
**Myth:** Read the parenting books, and you will know everything.

**REALITY:** New moms quickly find many books by so-called “experts” unrealistic, highlighting the joy and minimizing the difficulties of motherhood. Their idealistic portrayal can add to a new mother’s feelings of failure when they have a hard time achieving the mythical “bliss” they have read about.

**Myth:** You can care for a baby on your own.

**REALITY:** Often women mistakenly think that the instant they deliver, they will become radiant and serene mothers that gracefully handle the cooking, shopping and housekeeping. That is an impossible ideal. Moms need to ask for help from immediate family, friends, other parents and neighbors. Letting supportive people into your life is a sign of strength not weakness. Accepting help prevents you from spreading yourself too thin, which is unhealthy for your whole family.
The new demands, challenges and pressures of motherhood can leave you feeling overwhelmed. Here are some common complaints of new moms:

Many new moms often say:

- I am irritable
- I can’t sleep
- I can’t think straight
- I feel so nervous
- I feel so guilty
- I feel so tired
- I can’t feel anything
- I have no interest in sex or other normal activities
- I can’t get going
- I can’t stop eating
Baby Blues are common: Up to 80% of women experience Baby Blues. Baby Blues usually occur 2-5 days after delivery. With time, patient, and support, they go away.

About 1 in 5 women have PPD after they have a baby. PPD will require support to help you feel better. The chart below distinguishes between symptoms that are less serious (Baby Blues) and those that require support (PPD).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMPTOMS THAT ARE NOT SERIOUS</th>
<th>SYMPTOMS THAT REQUIRE SUPPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Several days of baby blues</td>
<td>Feeling very down for more than two weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional worries that come and go</td>
<td>Relentless anxiety that never goes away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative feelings and thoughts that come and go</td>
<td>Negative feelings that outweigh the positive feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>You can take care of yourself and your baby</td>
<td>You are unable to cope with your life or your baby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some escape fantasies</td>
<td>Thoughts about harming yourself or your baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor sleep due to caring for your baby</td>
<td>Not being able to sleep when your baby sleeps at night or needing to stay in bed all the time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Extreme exhaustion or agitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal appetite with normal fluctuations, i.e., your appetite may increase if you are nursing</td>
<td>Compulsive overeating or ongoing loss of appetite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some forgetfulness</td>
<td>Severe inability to concentrate and focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moments of sadness</td>
<td>Intense feelings of sadness that do not go away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing a break from your responsibilities and your baby</td>
<td>Avoiding your baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to limit visitors and activities</td>
<td>Withdrawing from the world and becoming isolated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional irritability and anger</td>
<td>Feelings of intense anger and irritability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from *When Baby Brings the Blues* by Dr. Ariel Dalfen, MD (Wiley, 2009)
Who Is At Risk?

Depression during pregnancy and during the first year after child birth can affect any woman – regardless of age, race, income, culture, or education.

Depression is a health problem, it is NOT the fault of any woman.

Risk Factors:

- History of depression or bipolar disorder
- History of alcohol or drug abuse
- Recent stressful events
- Relationship problems
- Financial problems
- Previous pregnancy with depression
THE STRONG KIT FOR MOMS

WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE DEPRESSION?

You are not alone! Help is available! The key is reaching out for support when you need it.

1. **Lean on Family and Friends**
   - A few hours of weekly childcare can give you a much-needed break
   - Get help cleaning the house or running errands
   - Sharing feelings openly allows family & friends to provide support

2. **Talk to Health Care Professional**
   - Doctors will know what options are available to you for help
   - Do not give up
   - Look for a different provider if you feel your current doctor does not understand what you are going through

3. **Find a Support Group**
   - Other women in your community may suffer from postpartum depression
   - Sharing your feelings with a group of women experiencing the same thing can be helpful
   - Talk to your health care provider about how to join a group

4. **Seek Counseling From an Expert**
   - Many behavioral health specialists have training in postpartum depression
   - They can give you a safe place to express your feelings and will be useful in helping you manage your symptoms

5. **Focus on Wellness**
   - Food: Eat breakfast, choose healthy snacks, avoid alcohol use
   - Exercise: Invite friends to go on walks, try a new activity
   - Self-care activities: Relax-do something nice for yourself, even if you are tired, doing something positive can improve your mood

6. **Take Medication as Recommended by Your Doctor**
   - Talk to your doctor about which medication, if any, is best for you
   - Ask your doctor about alternatives to medication
# THE STRONG KIT FOR MOMS

## MY NYC RESOURCES TO STAY STRONG

### Benefits
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (aka “food stamps”)
(718) 557-1399 or apply online: https://a069.access.nyc.gov/ACCESSNYC/application.do

Access to Benefits Helpline – Legal Aid
(888)-663-6880

### Employment Services
Educational Alliance Employment Services (also adult education)
(212) 780-2300

### Food Insecurity
Enter zip code for local food banks, community kitchens
http://foodhelp.nyc/en/
Emergency Food-line
(886) 888-8777

### Family Support Services
Nurse Family Partnership of New York City, NYC DOHMH
646-364-0726 or 646-364-0725
http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/locations/New-York/

MHA-NYC Family Resource Centers
Southern Bronx (718) 220-3868
Northern Bronx (718) 220-0456
Southern Manhattan (212) 964-5253
Northern Manhattan (212) 410-1820
Western Queens (718) 651-1960

Family Resource Center Brooklyn
(347) 394-5186

Health Families NY
http://www.healthfamiliesnewyork.org/programsites_nyc.html

### Legal Services
NYC Legal Services
(212) 431-7200

NYC Legal Aid Society
(212) 577-3300

 Volunteer Lawyers Program
(Free legal services)
(800) 339-7758

NYS Central Registrar Child Abuse & Maltreatment Hotline
(800) 342-3720

### Immigration Services
Cabini Immigrant Services
(212) 791-4590

Legal Aid Immigration Helpline
Fridays, 9:30am-12:30pm
(844) 955-3425

### Mental Health
LIFENET (24 hours)
(800)-LIFENET (English)
(800)-AYUDESE (Spanish)

Adult Protective Services Referral Hotline
(212) 630-1853

The Samaritans 24-Hour Crisis Hotline
(212) 673-3000

In case of psychiatric emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Room.

### Postpartum Depression
Postpartum New York
www.postpartumny.org/
Postpartum Support International
www.postpartum.net/

### Sexual Abuse
Bellevue Hospital Victim Services Program
(212) 562-3755

Rape and Sexual Assault Victims
(Safe Horizon)
(212) 227-3000 (24 hours)

Crime Victims Hotline
(866) 689-HELP (4357) (24 hours)

### Shelters
Prevention Assistance & Temporary Housing
(917) 521-3900
Domestic Violence Assistance, Child Protective Services, & other services available on site.

### Substance Abuse/Tobacco
NY State Smokers’ Quitline
(866) NYC-QUIT (697-8487)
http://www.nysmokefree.com

Educational Alliance (Project Contact)
(646) 395-4384
http://www.edalliance.org/drug_prevention_treatment_services

LIFENET
(800) LIFE-NET (543-3638)

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**THE STRONG KIT FOR MOMS**
“I have trouble eating and sleeping. I feel lonely, sad, and don’t have the energy to get things done. Sometimes I don’t even want to hold my baby. If this is supposed to be the happiest time of my life, why does everything feel so wrong?”

Patti, new mom
While all babies are different, regular sleep cycles typically do not begin until about 6 months of age. Until then:

- Keep your baby calm and quiet when you feed or change her during the night (e.g. lights down low, not a lot of playing).
- Keep baby active during the day (e.g. games). If more engaged during the day, baby will sleep better at night!
- Put your baby to bed when drowsy but still awake.
- Wait a few minutes before responding to your baby’s fussing.

**BATHING**

- There is no right or wrong way to bathe a baby. Once you have gotten yourself and your baby situated and your supplies ready, you may find it easiest to use your non-dominant arm and hand to support your baby’s head and back as needed.
- NEVER leave baby in the bath alone.
Breastfeeding is healthy for babies and can be a lovely experience for mother and baby together - but it is often hard to get going. It is worth trying hard for the first 2 weeks, if you can, since it usually takes 2-3 weeks for breast feeding to become well established.

- It can be OK to give supplemental formula AFTER 2 weeks but you will have more chance of successful breast feeding if you do not offer any formula at all for the first 2-3 weeks.

- Breastfeeding can be painful. Sometimes the milk is slow to start. Some babies are slow to learn how to be strong feeders. ASK YOUR DOCTOR FOR HELP. There are lactation consultants who are knowledgeable, kind and patient who can help you.

For more information on milk supply, positions, troubleshooting and more please visit: http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/Pages/default.aspx
STRATEGIES TO CALM A FUSSY BABY

• Swaddle (wrap snuggly) your baby
• Hold your baby
• Turn on a calming sound
• Walk your baby
• Avoid overfeeding

COLIC: TIPS TO MANAGE SYMPTOMS

• Walk your baby in a baby carrier to soothe her. The motion and body contact will reassure her, even if her discomfort persists.

• For bottle-fed babies, ask your child’s doctor if you should try a different formula. This has been shown to be helpful for some babies.

• Limit each daytime nap to no longer than 3 hours a day.

• Avoid overfeeding your baby. Babies who are overfed may become uncomfortable. In general, try to wait at least two to two and a half hours from the start of one feeding to the start of the next one.
• Rock her, run the vacuum in the next room, or place her where she can hear the clothes dryer, or a fan. Steady rhythmic motion and a calming sound may help her fall asleep.

• Introduce a pacifier. While some breastfed babies will actively refuse it, it will provide instant relief for others.

• Lay your baby tummy-down across your knees and gently rub her back. The pressure against her belly may help comfort her.

• Some babies may be fussy, try to soothe the baby however you can, and get help when you cannot take it any more. When you’re feeling tense and anxious, have a family member or a friend look after the baby—and get out of the house. Even an hour or two away may help you feel better.

• No matter how impatient or angry you become, a baby should never be shaken. Shaking an infant hard can cause blindness, brain damage, or even death.

• Let your own doctor know if you are depressed or are having trouble dealing with your emotions, as she can recommend ways to help.

For more information these and other topics, visit: [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)
For more information about The STRONG Kit for Moms contact:

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