

One in four mothers-to-be have mental health issues BEFORE birth: Warning problems are being missed because of incorrect belief that pregnant women have a feel-good 'glow'

 [dailymail.co.uk/health/article-5233591/One-four-mothers-mental-health-issues.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-5233591/One-four-mothers-mental-health-issues.html)

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One in four women develop mental health problems while pregnant, a study has found.

Awareness is growing about post-natal depression – but few people know problems can arrive before the baby is born.

Researchers at King's College London diagnosed mental health problems among 27 per cent of pregnant women.

Using a gold-standard psychological screening technique at midwife appointments, they found 11 per cent of women had depression, 15 per cent had anxiety, 2 per cent had eating disorders and 2 per cent obsessive-compulsive disorders, with many women having combinations of different problems.

These are usually missed because people wrongly believe women always suffer a feel-good 'glow' when they become pregnant.



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'This is a myth,' said researcher Professor Louise Howard, of the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's.

'People think that pregnancy is protective of mental health, and then the post-natal period is a trigger for problems. But in reality problems start during pregnancy or even earlier – it is very common.' She said rare and serious forms of mental disorders – such as severe post-natal psychosis – may be triggered by childbirth. But less severe depression and anxiety are likely to start during pregnancy itself.

Clinical psychologist Dr Camilla Rosan of the Mental Health Foundation, an expert in maternity, said pregnancy was a huge transformation in a woman's life. 'It's a time of lots of changes,' she said. 'There is a major renegotiation of a woman's identity, anxiety about what kind of mother she might be, and it sometimes reactivates problems from her own childhood. These are all potential triggers – and old traumas and pre-existing problems can also return.'

Crucially, she said, women are at a vulnerable point in their lives. And the impacts of depression or anxiety can have lasting effects on women and babies.



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She said: 'When you experience stress when you are pregnant it leads to changes in levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. Studies show these can have an impact on the development of the growing baby – it can affect their later academic achievements and cause problems with the development of emotional relationships.'

The study, funded by the research arm of the NHS and published in the British Journal of Psychiatry, involved 545 pregnant women in South London.

Professor Howard said women are seen so often by medical professionals during pregnancy they should never slip through the net.

Her study showed using proper psychological screening tools, based on simple questions about mood, could pick up problems. 'In clinical practice, maternity professionals need to identify whether or not a woman has any mental disorder, not only mood disorders which until recently have been the main focus of concern.

'Women should be asked, by a non-judgemental and supportive health professional, at all contacts in pregnancy and after birth about their emotional wellbeing.'