

Could sleep disruption during pregnancy trigger depression?

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Over 18 per cent of New Zealand women experience depressive symptoms during pregnancy. Credit: Massey University

A Massey University research study is looking to measure the sleep and mental health of new mothers throughout their pregnancy to determine what effect sleep disruption has on depression.

The Sleep HAPi (Sleep Health and Pregnancy Information) study is being run via the Sleep/Wake Research Centre in Wellington, by PhD candidate Clare Ladyman.

Over 18 per cent of New Zealand women experience depressive symptoms during pregnancy. With approximately 60,000 births every year, that equates to nearly 10,000 women who have their health comprised because of antenatal [depression](#). Ms Ladyman says women who have previously suffered depression are twice as likely to relapse during pregnancy and the risk could be further increased if their sleep is disrupted. Sleep disruption is almost unavoidable due to the enormous changes that pregnancy brings.

"The relationship between poor sleep and

depression is two-directional – poor sleep increases the risk of depression and depression is associated with [poor sleep](#). Our study is specifically looking at whether improving sleep in pregnancy can prevent a reoccurrence of depression for at risk women.

"We want to give women important, evidence-based information about sleep, including sleep changes that occur during [pregnancy](#). Importantly, we provide personal feedback on [sleep patterns](#) and behaviours, then talk through various strategies and ideas to try and improve their sleep," Ms Ladyman says.

The study involves measuring sleep for six weeks (two weeks in each trimester) by wearing a special watch-like device and filling out sleep diaries. Women will also answer a set of questions in each trimester, and then at six and 12 weeks after birth. Participants will also take part in three personalised, one-on-one [sleep health](#) sessions with a sleep scientist (one in each trimester), either at home, or at Massey University. This will give them an opportunity to get personalised advice about their own sleep.

"Sleep is one of the few modifiable risk factors for depression so it's important to investigate the efficacy of [sleep](#) intervention in the hope of identifying preventable, non-pharmacological, non-invasive, cost-effective treatments for both antenatal and postnatal depression," Ms Ladyman says.

Study participants will receive one \$50 voucher at the end of the third trimester and one further \$20 voucher after both the six and 12-week post-birth questionnaires are returned.

The Sleep/Wake Research Centre is after 30 to 40 [women](#) to take part in the study. The participants:

- Must be pregnant with their first baby
- Must be 13 weeks gestation or less

- Have previous history of depression
- Live in the greater Wellington area

More information: For a full list of participant criteria, please contact the Sleep HAPi study researchers:

Free Phone: 0800 MUMSLEEP

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Provided by Massey University

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