

### Transcript Details

This is a transcript of an educational program. Details about the program and additional media formats for the program are accessible by visiting: <https://reachmd.com/programs/advances-in-womens-health/maternal-mental-health-breastfeeding/56559/>

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## Supporting Maternal Mental Health During Breastfeeding

### Announcer:

Welcome to *Advances in Women's Health* on ReachMD. On this episode, we'll hear from Dr. Erin Henshaw, a licensed clinical psychologist and a Professor in the Department of Psychology at Denison University in Ohio. She'll be discussing strategies to support maternal mental health and lactation outcomes. Let's hear from Dr. Henshaw now

### Dr. Henshaw:

For women who are choosing to breastfeed, there are many things that we can do in the early support period that will help to improve the likelihood of good lactation outcomes and good mental health outcomes for a family.

So first, early and proactive lactation support is really essential for helping women to reduce frustration and improve their confidence. One of the things that we find is that women's self-efficacy or confidence in their ability to breastfeed is really formed based on some of these early experiences. And so to the extent that we can have a timely intervention to help women increase their confidence and increase their ability to feel they can manage the challenges of breastfeeding, that's helpful for breastfeeding outcomes, but also for women's mental health outcomes, because we find that how women are feeling about the breastfeeding experience is also relevant for the likelihood of other depressive symptoms popping up later.

So to that end, we want to think about how to provide support in multiple domains. So an integrated care model, for example, that involves obstetrics and pediatrics and mental health is especially effective because the signals to the women not one provider can do all of the things fully for a mom, and she may have both some physical health concerns, but also mental health concerns, and those both may be playing out in the way that breastfeeding is experienced. So having a wrapped around integrative care team signals that all parts of this are essential for mother and infant health and also reduces the barriers for mothers being able to connect with the help that they need rather than getting a referral or having to go outside of the specialty area. That is a model that seems to work especially well for busy mothers, for whom it may be a difficult process just getting out of the house with an infant to attend one appointment. To the extent that we can integrate that care to address more than one need at a time, that seems to be an especially helpful model.

There's also a role for partners and for family. So among mothers who have a co-parent partner and among mothers who have someone else they turn to for support, whether it's their own mother, family member, sister, or friend, family involvement in a positive way can really help with buffering stress.

One of the easiest ways to think about doing this is to think about two kinds of support. The practical or logistical support of caring for the infant, perhaps helping the mom find time to address her own sleep needs or caring for the infant in some situations where the mother may need to get other medical care. Or helping with things like laundry and other childcare to make the burden of caring for a newborn a little bit less. And then on the other hand, we have emotional and social support. So continuing to engage with the mother specifically, to learn about how she's feeling, to talk with her about things that she enjoys, to make some space, and to encourage her to make some space for things that have been stress-relieving activities for her in the past that might be more difficult to do with a young infant but, with the right social support, can be encouraged and can continue to be a key part of how she's recovering during the postpartum period.

### Announcer:

That was Dr. Erin Henshaw sharing strategies to support mental health among women who are breastfeeding. To access this and other episodes in our series, visit *Advances in Women's Health* on ReachMD.com, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. Thanks for listening!