The deadly mum's guide to feeling great
Welcome

If you have a baby or young children, then this booklet is for you.

Becoming a mum is a special and exciting experience.

Having a baby creates huge changes that affect your body, your emotions, and your relationships. Coping with these changes can sometimes be overwhelming.

When you are a mum, it’s important to look after yourself. The best way to do this is to eat well, keep fit, and spend time relaxing with the people you care about.

This booklet gives you information on how to look after yourself at this special, yet busy, time of your life.

This booklet provides general information and guidance only. It should not be used as a substitute for medical advice given to you by qualified healthcare workers. Always seek professional help if you have specific questions or concerns.
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Staying fit

Exercising every day helps you stay healthy and feel good. Exercise tones your muscles, strengthens your bones, improves your blood flow, and helps you manage your weight.

When you have a baby or young children, it can sometimes be difficult to find time for exercise but staying fit is very important for your body and your mood.

Being active helps you sleep better at night and gives you more energy during the day. This means you can better cope with everyday challenges and make the most of life.
What kinds of activities can I do?

You should try for 2½ to 5 hours of moderate activity each week.

There are many ways to be active. Here are some ideas you can try:

- Go for a walk. Put your baby in a pram and walk to a friend’s house or the shops.
- Play chase or kick a ball around with your children.
- Play a group sport such as soccer, netball, basketball, or touch football.
- Do some gardening. Mowing the lawn is a great way to get your heart rate up.
- Walk to a nearby fishing spot and go fishing.
- Do squats, lunges, and step-ups at home.
- Try increasing your heart rate while you do everyday tasks such as cleaning and vacuuming.

Remember, physical activity doesn’t need to be hard. It just needs to be regular for you to benefit.

For more exercise ideas, visit your local Indigenous Health Service or speak to your doctor, midwife, or health worker. They can make you a fun exercise plan that fits in with your life.
How soon can I start exercising again?

For the first six weeks after giving birth, you need to rest and recover, especially if you had a caesarean delivery.

After six weeks, you can start light exercise when you feel ready. Don’t do too much too soon! Start with light activities such as walking and swimming and gradually build up the intensity.

Always listen to your body. If you feel any pain or dizziness, stop and rest.

Are there exercises I should avoid?

Yes. In the first few months after giving birth, avoid high-intensity activities such as aerobics and heavy weightlifting. Avoid vigorous stretching and stay away from activities that involve rapid direction changes, such as netball.

Instead, try low-impact exercises such as walking, swimming, and cycling.

Once you have fully recovered from childbirth, it is okay to do all the activities you enjoyed before pregnancy. If you are unsure about which exercises you can do, speak to your health worker.

Will exercise affect my breast milk?

No. Doing light or moderate exercise won’t affect how much breast milk you make, or what’s in it. To find out more about breastfeeding and exercise, visit www.breastfeeding.asn.au.
There can be lots of reasons why exercising is difficult. Here are some tips to help you get motivated:

- Think positively. Try not to think of exercise as a chore. Instead, see it as an opportunity to get fit and feel good.

- Set realistic goals. Challenge yourself to walk to the local park and back each morning, or to head to the shops on foot instead of in the car. Start small and gradually work your way towards larger goals.

- Plan ahead. If you can’t fit in a walk or swim today, don’t feel guilty. Instead, make sure you plan for tomorrow so you don’t miss out again.

- Try to mix it up. Including lots of different activities into your week can make exercising more fun.

- Exercise with other people. You’re more likely to stick to an exercise plan if other people are counting on you. Set up times each week to meet with your friends or join a local exercise group.
Be competitive. Try wearing a pedometer around the house, or using a free step-count app on your smartphone. You’ll be able to see how many steps you’ve done in a day, and you can challenge yourself to increase your score. You could even try competing with a friend.

Listen to your body. When you’re feeling tired, it’s important to relax. Include some gentle activities in your weekly routine. For example, put on some relaxing music and dance. You’ll feel much better if you relax properly than if you slump in front of the TV.
What are the pelvic floor muscles?

Your pelvic floor muscles support the organs in your pelvis, including your womb. They help you control when you pee.

During pregnancy, the weight of your baby can weaken these muscles. Giving birth can also stretch and weaken them, especially if you have a big baby or a difficult delivery.

If your pelvic floor muscles are weak, you may accidentally leak small amounts of pee when you cough, sneeze, bend, lift, laugh, exercise, or play sport.
I sometimes leak pee when I laugh, sneeze, and cough. What can I do to stop this?

A good way to stop this from happening is to do pelvic floor exercises:

- First, make sure you know where your pelvic floor muscles are. They are the muscles you use to stop yourself from peeing.
- Squeeze the muscles tight and hold them for a few seconds, then relax.
- Try to do a set of 10 squeezes, 5 times a day.
- Once you are comfortable with the exercise, try squeezing for up to 10 seconds at a time.

Doing pelvic floor exercises the wrong way can be bad for you. If you need help, speak to your midwife, health worker, or doctor.

Can exercising and playing sport weaken my pelvic floor muscles?

Yes. High-impact exercises such as running, jumping, and boxing, can damage your pelvic floor muscles. Some gym exercises, such as sit-ups, crunches, planks, and heavy weightlifting can also be harmful.

After giving birth, it is best to stick to safe exercises such as swimming, walking and cycling. For more information, visit [www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au](http://www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au), or speak to your midwife, health worker, or doctor.
Eating well

Choosing a variety of healthy foods every day will give you energy and help you manage your weight. Being a healthy weight lowers your risk of developing illnesses such as diabetes, many types of cancer, and heart disease.

When you are busy or tired it can be tempting to choose takeaway and junk foods. These are usually high in fat, sugar, and salt. It’s better to swap these foods for nutritious meals made with vegetables, fruit, lean meats, and wholegrain foods.
What should I eat?

Choose a variety of foods each day from the five food groups:

- vegetables (try to eat a variety of colours), dried beans, and dried peas
- fruit (try to eat a variety of colours)
- grain foods, such as wholemeal bread, wholemeal pasta, rice noodles, brown rice, long-grain rice, and high-fibre breakfast cereals (wheat flakes, bran cereals, and oats)
- milk, yoghurt, and cheese (choose low-fat varieties if possible)
- proteins, such as lean meats, chicken, fish, seafood, eggs, beans (baked beans, kidney beans, lentils), nuts, and seeds.

What shouldn’t I eat?

Try to eat less junk foods such as fried food, chips, takeaway food, processed meat, cakes, biscuits, pies, pastries, chocolate, and lollies.

Try to have less sugary drinks, such as fruit juice, cordial, soft drinks, and energy drinks.
Eating well is easy if you remember these three simple rules:

1. **Eat plenty**: vegetables, fruit, and wholegrains
2. **Eat some**: meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy
3. **Eat less**: fat, sugar, salt.
How much should I eat each day?

Choosing healthy foods is important. You also need to pay attention to how much you eat.

Every day, aim to eat:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 SERVES OF WHOLEGRAIN FOODS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A serve is equal to 1 piece of wholemeal bread or ½ cup of cooked brown rice, pasta or noodles.</td>
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<td>1 serve = ½ cup or 1/2 cup or 1/2 cup or 1/2 cup or 1 slice</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>5 SERVES OF VEGETABLES OR BEANS</th>
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<tr>
<td>A serve is equal to ½ cup of cooked vegetables, 1 cup of salad greens, 1 tomato, or ½ cup of canned beans or lentils.</td>
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<td>1 serve = 1 piece or ½ cup or ½ cup or 1 cup or ½ cup</td>
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Pregnant women and breastfeeding mums need extra nutrients.

If you are breastfeeding, your recommended daily serves are slightly higher. See page 18 for more information.

If you are pregnant, visit www.eatforhealth.gov.au to find out how many serves of each food group you should eat.

2 SERVES OF FRUIT

A serve is equal to 1 medium piece of fruit or 2 small pieces of fruit.

1 serve =

2½ SERVES OF LEAN MEAT, FISH, POULTRY, EGGS, BEANS, NUTS, AND SEEDS

A serve is equal to a small piece of cooked meat or chicken, ½ cup of mince, a small tin of tuna, a medium fish fillet, or 2 eggs.

1 serve =

2½ SERVES OF REDUCED-FAT MILK, YOGHURT, AND CHEESE

A serve is equal to 1 cup of milk, 2 slices of cheese, or a small tub of yoghurt.

1 serve =

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What does a healthy meal look like?

Fill half of your plate with vegetables. Fill one quarter with lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs, or beans. Fill the remaining quarter with wholegrain foods. For example, eat a large salad with a piece of grilled fish and some long-grain rice.
I feel tired all the time. Do I need to eat more strong blood foods?

If you feel tired all the time, you may be low in iron. Eating strong blood foods (iron-rich foods) can help.

Lean red meats, chicken, fish, pork, dried fruit, baked beans, and dark green leafy vegetables such as broccoli and spinach are strong blood foods. When you eat strong blood foods it’s a good idea to eat foods that contain vitamin C (orange juice, capsicums, and tomatoes) at the same time. Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron.

Talk to your health worker if you think you have low iron.

Sugary drinks are bad for you.

Soft drinks and energy drinks are full of sugar. They can make you put on weight. Being overweight can lead to serious health problems, including heart disease and diabetes.

Try to drink less soft drinks, energy drinks, cordial, or fruit juice. Water is a better option. Water is refreshing, cheap, and good for you. Always carry a bottle of water with you when you go out so you are not tempted to buy sugary drinks.

For healthy recipe ideas, visit:

www.eatforhealth.gov.au
www.diabetesqld.org.au
www.healthier.qld.gov.au/recipes

www.healthyfoodhealthyplanet.org
www.heartfoundation.org.au
Breastfeeding is healthy for you and your baby

Breastfeeding is the healthiest way to feed your baby. It helps your baby develop well and protects them from many illnesses. After you give birth, breastfeeding can also help you get back into shape faster.

Eating a healthy diet, drinking plenty of water, and getting enough rest, will give you the best chance of producing enough milk for your baby.

Many women find breastfeeding difficult at first. Breastfeeding takes time, practice and patience. Speak to your midwife, health worker, or maternal and child health nurse if you need some help.

**How much do I need to eat if I’m breastfeeding?**

Breastfeeding mums need to eat a little breastfeeding. Every day, aim to eat:

- 9 serves of wholegrain foods
- 7½ serves of vegetables or beans
- 2 serves of fruit
- 2½ serves of lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, beans, nuts, and seeds
- 2½ serves of reduced-fat milk, yoghurt, and cheese.

Remember to drink plenty of water and to avoid alcohol. Alcohol passes into your breastmilk and is bad for your baby.
Diabetes is a serious disease that develops when there is too much sugar in your blood.

Sometimes women develop diabetes when they are pregnant. This is called gestational diabetes. Women with gestational diabetes need to monitor their blood sugar and pay extra attention to eating well and keeping fit.

If you had gestational diabetes during pregnancy, you will need to have a blood glucose test 6 weeks after giving birth to check your diabetes status. For many women, gestational diabetes improves after birth; however, you are more at risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in life – one in two women who had gestational diabetes will go on to develop type 2 diabetes. Your baby is also more likely to develop type 2 diabetes during their lifetime.

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes. It can cause health problems such as kidney failure, blindness, and heart disease. Anyone can develop type 2 diabetes but people who are overweight, inactive, and smoke are more at risk.

The good news is that you can reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes by eating well and keeping fit. To learn more, talk to your midwife, health worker or doctor. They can put you in touch with a dietitian and help you learn more about healthy eating.
How can I make mealtimes healthier?

When you have a baby or small children at home, it can be difficult to find the time and energy to cook healthy meals. Here are some ideas to help:

- For a healthy and cheap way to stretch meals further, add extra vegetables to stews, curries, soups, and pastas. For example, add chopped carrot or zucchini to the mince when you’re cooking spaghetti sauce. If you don’t have fresh vegetables, use frozen, or tinned vegetables.

- Serve healthy stews, curries, and soups with wholegrain foods, rather than white rice or white bread. Choose brown rice, long-grain rice, or wholemeal bread, and only eat a small amount.

- Serve meals with a side salad. Wash some lettuce, or chop a tomato and some cucumber and serve them with your meal. To cut down on costs, use fruit and vegetables that are in season.

- If you live near the coast, or near a river or stream, go fishing. Fresh fish is very healthy, and you can teach your children how to catch fresh food.

- If you regularly eat instant noodles, you can make them healthier by stirring in vegetables, eggs, shredded chicken, tinned beans, or tinned fish. Adding vegetables and protein will make you feel full for longer. And instead of instant noodles, try rice noodles.
Avoid takeaway foods. They often aren’t good value. You can buy healthier, cheaper food at the supermarket. For example, instead of buying fried chicken at a fast-food restaurant, buy chicken fillets and grill them at home.

Try not to fry foods. It is better to steam, microwave, grill, or dry roast your food. When you do fry food, use oil spray instead of bottled oil.

Instead of adding cream to curries, soups, and sauces, add low-fat natural yoghurt.

If you want to find out more about how you can eat healthier meals, talk to your health worker. They can offer ideas and if you need more help, they can organise for you to see a nutritionist or dietician for free.
Feeling good

It’s important to take care of your emotional health. When you feel good, you cope better. This means you can manage the day-to-day stresses of being a mum more easily, and you can enjoy life more.

Staying fit and eating well are two of the best ways to keep your body healthy and your spirit strong.

Staying connected to your community also helps keep you emotionally healthy. It is important to build strong relationships with your partner, family, and friends.
Is it normal to feel down sometimes?

Yes. Most mums experience a range of emotions. When you have a new baby many things change, including your routine, your relationships, your self-image, and your role in the family. It takes time to adjust.

Sometimes you may feel happy. At other times, you may feel worried, sad or overwhelmed. You might feel anxious if your baby won’t settle, or disappointed if you have trouble breastfeeding. It’s normal to have these feelings.

If you feel down, or feel like you can’t cope, it’s okay to ask for help. Talk to someone you trust. Speak to your partner, a friend or family member, your doctor, your midwife, or your health worker. Remember, you’re not alone.
Who can I ask for help if I can’t cope?

If you feel so sad that it’s affecting your day-to-day life, you might have postnatal depression.

It’s important to chat to your doctor, midwife, or health worker as soon as you can if you feel so sad that you:

- aren’t sleeping well
- don’t feel like getting out of bed
- don’t feel like eating
- don’t enjoy activities you normally like
- can’t think properly
- can’t concentrate or remember things
- don’t feel like yourself
- are experiencing low self-confidence or low self-esteem
- feel angry, afraid, ashamed, or sad
- feel like harming yourself or your baby.

Talk to someone who understands

You can speak to a nurse or midwife at Women’s Health Queensland Wide about anything that’s on your mind. All you need to do is call. Phone calls are free and confidential.

Call (07) 3216 0376 or 1800 017 676 (outside Brisbane) any weekday from 9am-5pm (except Wednesdays, when you can call from 12.30pm-5pm).
How can I stay connected to my community?

Keeping healthy is easier if you have people to support you. Here are some tips to help you stay connected with the people in your life:

- If you’re feeling stressed, try to spend time outdoors with family and friends. Play chase with the kids, or join a game of touch footy at the park. It can be fun to walk to the local fishing spot and spend the afternoon by the water with your baby and friends.

- Talk to other mothers. Meet up with friends who have babies or young children, or join a playgroup or mothers’ group in your area.

- Join an online group. Online groups are good for women who don’t have transport and find it difficult to get out of the house. Remember that the information people post online is not always correct, so if you are unsure about something you read online, talk to your health worker.

- Remember it’s okay to ask for help. If your mum, sister, or aunty offers to do the dishes, pick up some shopping, or bring over a cooked meal, it’s okay to say yes. Don’t feel guilty about accepting help.
Take time out for yourself

It’s important to take time out for yourself when you need to. It’s okay to ask a friend you trust to mind your baby for an hour or two so you can go for a walk or listen to some music on your own.

It’s also important to spend time getting to know your baby. It’s okay to take your older children to school or childcare so you can have time alone with your baby.

Have confidence in yourself

When you have a new baby, it may seem as though everyone has advice for you. Some of this is helpful, but some isn’t. Have confidence in your own skills as a mum. Remember, it’s okay to ask family and friends to give you some space if you need it.
How can I connect with my partner?

Learning to communicate openly and honestly with your partner is important.

If you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, tell your partner. If you don’t talk to them, it will be difficult for them to understand how you feel. It’s also helpful to ask them how they feel, and to try to understand their emotions.

Discuss what you expect from each other and how you will support each other. For example, discuss who will get up during the night if the baby cries, who will do the cooking, and who will take the children to school.

Remember to let your partner know you appreciate them.

Making time for each other is also important. If you can, ask someone you trust to mind your baby for an hour or two so you and your partner can go for a walk, or relax at home together.
When can I start having sex again?

It’s okay to start having sex again once the bleeding stops, usually after 4 to 6 weeks. Some mums feel like having sex sooner. Other mums don’t feel ready for much longer.

The right time to start having sex again is when you feel emotionally and physically ready, and that’s different for everyone.

Discuss how you feel with your partner. It is important that you don't pressure each other for sex. Wait until you both feel ready.

**Contraception (spacing your pregnancies)**

When you are ready to start having sex again, you need to think about contraception (birth control). You can get pregnant again within weeks of giving birth, even if you are breastfeeding.

Contraception is very effective at stopping you from becoming pregnant. As well as preventing pregnancy, condoms protect you from most sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

There are many different types of contraception, including:

- condoms
- the needle (Depo-Provera)
- the implant (Implanon)
- IUDs (intrauterine devices)
- the Pill.

They all have advantages and disadvantages. Some forms are safe to use while you breastfeed but others are not. Speak to your doctor, nurse, or health worker about which type of contraception is best for you. Talking to your partner about the decision is also a good idea.
How can I protect myself and my children from unhealthy behaviours at home?

Being aware of unhealthy behaviours can help you protect yourself and your children. Here are some unhealthy behaviours to look out for:

**Alcohol and drugs**
Using alcohol or drugs when you are pregnant or breastfeeding can harm you and your baby. It’s really important that you don’t use them if you co-sleep with your baby. If you have been drinking or using drugs, don’t feel ashamed. Remember, it’s never too late to stop, and stopping now will help you and your baby down the track. For help, chat to your doctor, midwife, or health worker. They are there to help you, not judge you.

If someone in your family drinks alcohol or uses drugs, it can cause relationship problems. Talk to your health worker if you think drinking and drugs are a problem for your family.

**Smoking**
The poisons in cigarette smoke can harm you and your children. Never smoke near your baby or children. They can develop chest infections, asthma, and ear infections if people smoke near them. Talk to your health worker about how you can quit smoking.
Domestic and family violence

Violence doesn't just mean being hit, punched, or kicked. Violence comes in many other forms. Domestic violence happens when someone in your family does things to control and dominate you. For example, they could:

- threaten you
- force you to do sexual things you don’t want to do
- control your money
- control your phone
- stop you from going out
- stop you from seeing your family and friends
- yell and swear at you
- call you names
- make you feel worthless.

Domestic violence is a very serious problem. It can cause stress and anxiety, and it can affect how your baby grows and develops.

If you are experiencing violence and you are worried about safety, you can:

- call the police or go to the police station
- go to a safe place
- talk to someone you trust, such as a friend, a family member, your doctor, or your health worker
- call the DVConnect Womensline on 1800 811 811. The phone line is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They can help develop a safe plan for you and your children, and they can help organise transport and accommodation if you need it.
If I need to talk to someone about any of the topics covered in this booklet, where can I go for help?

**Visit your local Indigenous Health Service**

Speak to your regular health worker, community wellbeing worker, case worker, or maternal and child health nurse if you have any questions.

After you have a baby, it’s important to have a health check-up every year. You also need to have regular Pap smears and breast checks. Your local Indigenous Health Service can organise these for you.

They can also give you information about applying for Centrelink payments, finding housing, and getting back into work or study.

**Phone Women’s Health Queensland Wide (Women’s Health)**

Women’s Health runs a free health information line. You can chat to a nurse or midwife about anything that’s on your mind. All phone calls are confidential.

The Women’s Health nurses and midwives are caring and friendly. They won’t judge you. They are there to help.

Call (07) 3216 0376 or 1800 017 676 (toll-free outside Brisbane). The line is open weekdays from 9am-5pm (except Wednesdays, when it is open from 12.30pm-5pm).

Visit [www.womhealth.org.au](http://www.womhealth.org.au) to download fact sheets, ask health questions online, or for a list of useful websites. You can also find information and ask questions via [www.facebook.com/WomensHealthQldWide](http://www.facebook.com/WomensHealthQldWide).

**For urgent help, call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or beyondblue on 1300 22 4636. Both services operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**
Who produced this booklet?

The first edition of this resource was prepared in 2009 by Communio for Women’s Health Queensland Wide Inc (Women’s Health) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Services (ATSICHS) Mackay Ltd.

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If you would like more information about any of the topics covered in this booklet, please contact Women’s Health by email at admin@womhealth.org.au; by phone on (07) 3216 0376 or 1800 017 676 (toll-free outside Brisbane); or by post at PO Box 195, Fortitude Valley Qld 4006.

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When you are a mum, looking after yourself is just as important as looking after your children.

Eating well and staying fit helps keep you healthy. Spending time with family and friends, and taking time out to do the things you enjoy helps keep your spirit strong.

Being healthy and feeling good gives you the energy you need to care for your family and have fun along the way.