# Large-scale study affirms benefits of singing classes for postnatal depression



Specially designed group singing classes have been demonstrated as a clinically effective and potentially cost-efficient intervention for treating postnatal depression, according to a large-scale study published recently. Originating in 2017 in south London, the "Melodies for Mums" programme now supports over 400 young mothers annually across five boroughs, with the sessions carefully crafted to address symptoms of postnatal depression through a blend of lullabies, folk, and gospel music performed in multiple languages and four-part harmonies.

Postnatal depression affects more than one in ten women within a year of childbirth, with symptoms ranging from persistent sadness and anxiety to difficulties in self-care and social withdrawal. Traditional treatments often involve talking therapies or medication, but these can be difficult to access due to long NHS waiting times—sometimes extending to six months for assessment and up to a year for individual treatment. The Melodies for Mums initiative offers a complementary or alternative option that is more immediately accessible and has been embraced by healthcare professionals recommending the programme amid strained mental health services.

The effectiveness of the singing classes was rigorously evaluated in a Wellcome Trust-funded study involving nearly 200 mothers over eight months. The research found that while all participants experienced some symptom reduction by the end of a 10-week course, those in the singing group showed continued improvement for six months afterward. The singing group also maintained higher attendance and satisfaction rates, with many participants reporting the sessions better matched their needs. This longer-term impact signifies the intervention’s potential beyond immediate symptom relief.

Researchers theorise that the benefits stem from a combination of factors: sharing the experience with other mothers facing similar challenges fosters social connection without the need for explicit discussion of personal struggles, while the act of singing itself may produce calming physiological effects. Preliminary biological data supports this, showing that participants in the singing groups exhibited steady declines in cortisol levels—an indicator of reduced stress. Additionally, the sessions encouraged stronger bonding between mothers and their babies, with musical activities being continued at home following the programme.

Various testimonies underscore the personal impact of the project. One participant described the experience as a "game changer," highlighting the sanctuary the sessions provided during a particularly vulnerable time. Another mother noted how sharing the experience with others helped her feel less isolated in what is often a lonely phase of life. The project's organisers, including Breathe Arts Health Research, emphasise that these classes are designed not to replace but to complement existing therapies, and they envision the model as broadly scalable. They have begun piloting sessions for young fathers and have been commissioned by the World Health Organization to train teams internationally.

Cost analysis from the King's College London-led study indicates that the programme's expense, ranging from £126 to £539 per mother and baby, compares favourably with other community-based educational programmes and is markedly less than group therapy or home visits. This economic viability added to proven clinical benefits strengthens the case for integrating singing interventions into routine NHS maternal mental health services.

The shift toward digital delivery of such programmes has also been explored. During the COVID-19 pandemic, an online version of Melodies for Mums was found feasible and supportive of maternal mental health, particularly helping those unable to attend face-to-face sessions. This adaptability ensures wide-ranging access and inclusivity, facilitating support for mothers in diverse circumstances and geographical locations.

Large-scale collaborative research between institutions like King's College London and University College London continues to build the evidence base for music therapy as a mainstream treatment for postnatal depression. With mental health systems under increasing pressure, such innovative, accessible, and culturally enriching approaches could provide vital support to new mothers navigating postnatal mental health challenges.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c93127z99yxo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[4]](https://breatheahr.org/research/melodies-for-mums/), [[5]](https://resolve.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/clinical-effectiveness-implementation-effectiveness-and-costeffectiveness-of-a-community-singing-intervention-for-postnatal-depressive-symptoms-shaperpnd-randomised-controlled-trial/81B7D946AE49C5589649BF20F37EF76A)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c93127z99yxo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[5]](https://resolve.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/clinical-effectiveness-implementation-effectiveness-and-costeffectiveness-of-a-community-singing-intervention-for-postnatal-depressive-symptoms-shaperpnd-randomised-controlled-trial/81B7D946AE49C5589649BF20F37EF76A)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c93127z99yxo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[4]](https://breatheahr.org/research/melodies-for-mums/), [[5]](https://resolve.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/clinical-effectiveness-implementation-effectiveness-and-costeffectiveness-of-a-community-singing-intervention-for-postnatal-depressive-symptoms-shaperpnd-randomised-controlled-trial/81B7D946AE49C5589649BF20F37EF76A)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c93127z99yxo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[5]](https://resolve.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/clinical-effectiveness-implementation-effectiveness-and-costeffectiveness-of-a-community-singing-intervention-for-postnatal-depressive-symptoms-shaperpnd-randomised-controlled-trial/81B7D946AE49C5589649BF20F37EF76A), [[6]](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37501172/)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c93127z99yxo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://bmcpsychology.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40359-024-02213-7> - A study published in BMC Psychology explored the active ingredients and mechanisms of an online singing programme for mothers experiencing postnatal depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research identified key features of the programme that supported new mothers, leading to improved mental health. The findings can inform the design of future online creative health interventions and tailor in-person activities for remote delivery to extend geographical reach and support populations who may struggle to attend in-person sessions.
3. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29436333/> - A randomised controlled trial published in PubMed assessed the effect of singing interventions on symptoms of postnatal depression. The study involved 134 mothers with symptoms of postnatal depression, who were randomised into three groups: group singing workshops, group play workshops, or usual care. The results indicated that mothers with moderate-severe symptoms of postnatal depression in the singing group experienced a faster improvement in symptoms compared to those in the usual care group.
4. <https://breatheahr.org/research/melodies-for-mums/> - Breathe Arts Health Research's 'Melodies for Mums' programme is based on a robust research programme led by the Royal College of Music and Imperial College London, funded by Arts Council England. The research used multiple approaches to investigate if and how group singing can support women with symptoms of postnatal depression. The findings showed that group singing can have multiple benefits, including a significant reduction in symptoms of postnatal depression and enhanced feelings of closeness with their babies.
5. <https://resolve.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/clinical-effectiveness-implementation-effectiveness-and-costeffectiveness-of-a-community-singing-intervention-for-postnatal-depressive-symptoms-shaperpnd-randomised-controlled-trial/81B7D946AE49C5589649BF20F37EF76A> - A study published in The British Journal of Psychiatry evaluated the clinical effectiveness, implementation effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness of a community singing intervention for postnatal depressive symptoms. The research found that the 'Melodies for Mums' singing intervention had a long-lasting effect on symptoms of postnatal depression and was perceived to be more suitable than existing activities. The study concluded that the programme represents a worthwhile investment for healthcare systems as an intervention for mothers experiencing symptoms of postnatal depression.
6. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37501172/> - A single-arm clinical trial published in PubMed evaluated the feasibility, clinical efficacy, and well-being outcomes of an online singing intervention for postnatal depression in the UK. The study found that the online version of the 'Melodies for Mums' programme was feasible for mothers who participated and supported the mental health and well-being of new mothers experiencing postnatal depression, especially when barriers to in-person treatment are present.
7. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/the-impact-of-singing-on-symptoms-of-postnatal-depression> - King's College London and UCL are leading the world's largest study into the effect of group singing on the mental health of new mothers and their babies. Supported by a £2m award from the Wellcome Trust, the study aims to provide further evidence of the intervention's efficacy and build a case for commissioning music therapy as a standard NHS treatment for postnatal depression.