

Postnatal Depression

This factsheet provides some information on postnatal depression and services that may be of help. Some of the information is taken from National Mind's booklet 'Postnatal Depression'.

What is postnatal depression?

It is common that 2-4 days after the birth of a baby some mothers feel emotional and tearful for no obvious reason. New mothers may be unable to sleep, even when the baby allows them to, and they may not wish to eat. They may also feel guilty, sad, afraid and anxious, as they may not perceive themselves as being good mothers. This is known as the 'baby blues'. These may occur as a result of hormonal changes after birth, and though they can be distressing they normally only last a few days.

However, if this continues, or becomes worse, it may develop into postnatal depression for about one in ten new mothers. It can develop at any time within the first year of giving birth, either suddenly or gradually, and can vary from being mild to very severe. Very rarely some mothers may develop a severe form of depression, puerperal psychosis.

What are the symptoms?

The following symptoms may vary from person to person but include: feeling low in mood, despondent, tearful; feeling tired or even numb, losing interest in things; feeling inadequate and not able to cope; feeling guilty, perhaps about not loving the baby more; hostile or indifferent towards the baby; irritable; loss of appetite; difficulties with sleep; hostile or indifferent towards partner; lack of interest in sex; overwhelming anxiety or panic attacks, (rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, feeling faint); unable to concentrate or make decisions; physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomach pains; obsessive fears about the baby's health, or about yourself or other family members; contemplating death.

What causes postnatal depression?

It is likely that there are a number of contributing factors that vary from person to person: changes in hormonal levels; previous experience of depression, especially postnatal depression; poor family support; previous traumatic or premature birth or termination; recent experience of stressful events, like moving home or a bereavement; poor housing or financial worries; loss (even temporary) of career.

For some new mothers the responsibility of a new baby can be overwhelming. Some don't feel like going out, others feel that they cannot leave their baby alone and as a result, may stop going out. Another may have unrealistic expectations of herself and the baby and feel unable to cope. A lack of support, either in the family, or through being sent home immediately after the birth, may make some women more prone to postnatal depression. A long and difficult labour, or an unplanned caesarean section may be triggers. A traumatic childbirth may negatively affect the relationship between the mother and her baby, as well as perhaps with her partner.

Some mothers may be afraid to tell their health visitors what they are experiencing, fearful that this will lead to their children being taken from them because they will be perceived as bad mothers.

What is puerperal psychosis?

This is a rare but extremely serious disorder. The new mother may experience severe depression alongside delusions or confusion, mania, or mood swings between the two.

Typically it begins a few weeks after childbirth, and the mother may feel excited, or restless, and disorientated. She may not even recognise loved ones, and this may disrupt her ability to bond with the baby. She may experience delusions (for instance, she believes she can save the world) or hallucinations, in which she sees or hear things that others don't. She may no longer be able to distinguish between reality and what is happening in her mind.

Puerperal psychosis may occur suddenly and unexpectedly, although there is some evidence to suggest that it may be genetic, and women who have a family history or they themselves have a previous history of serious mental health issues have a higher risk of developing it. Puerperal psychosis is more likely to occur in the first pregnancy than in subsequent ones. However, having experienced it once does not mean it will recur after future pregnancies. Puerperal psychosis may cause some women to feel suicidal and some may even try to kill their babies, so it is imperative that help is sought early on. Many women are able to cope again after a few weeks, but for others it will take longer.

Where can I get help?

Usually your health visitor assesses postnatal depression by using a questionnaire, the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale. This has been designed for British women and caution is needed in its use with women from non-western cultures.

You should see your GP who may prescribe you antidepressant medication, and if you are breastfeeding, the doctor can prescribe an antidepressant that will allow you to continue to do so. Your GP may also refer you to a mental health professional, and you should receive regular support from your health visitor. There are also organisations to help you manage if you have other children. You will benefit from someone to share your feelings with, whether through counselling or self-help support groups. Your GP or health visitor can advise you.

Local Voluntary Services

Harrow Carers

376-378 Pinner Road, Harrow, Middlesex, HA2 6DZ

Tel: 020 8868 5224

Opening Times: Mon-Fri 9-5pm

Email: admin@harrowcarers.org

Website: www.harrowcarers.org

Support for carers of people with mental health issues

Home-start

The Home-Start Centre

8 - 10 West Walk

Leicester

LE1 7NA

Tel: 0116 258 7900 | Fax: 0116 258 7901

Email: info@home-start.org.uk

Website: www.home-start.org.uk/findus/london

Support to families with at least one child under five; visits, support groups; first-time mothers' group

Yakeen Counselling Service

Sejal Sanghvi, 1 St Kilda's Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1QD

Tel: 020 8427 6796 , Fax: 020 8427 6796

Email: d.a.w.n.@btconnect.com

Website: http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/counsellor_2472.html

Opening Times: Mon-Fri 9.00am-5.00pm.

Counselling for Asian women in several Asian languages

Local Statutory Services (Referral by your GP)

Harrow Assessment and Brief Treatment Team

839 Honeypot Lane, Stanmore HA7 1AT

Tel (East): 020 8951 3770 (9am-5pm) 0800 0234 650 (5pm-8am) Weekends and Bank Holiday

Website: www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/harrow-assessment-and-brief-treatment-team

Harrow Community Recovery Team

Atkins House, 19 Marshall Close, Harrow HA1 4DH

Tel. 020 8422 9443 (9am-5pm), 020 8869 2304 (5pm-9am)

Website: www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/harrow-community-recovery-team

Out-of-Hours Urgent Advice Line 0800 0234 650

The Out-of-Hours Urgent Advice Line is a telephone service primarily for users of mental health and learning disabilities services, and their friends, carers and relatives.

It provides crisis support, information, advice and signposting to mental health and learning disability services in the boroughs of Brent, Harrow, Hillingdon, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster.

The line is open Monday to Friday from 5pm to 8am and is a 24 hour service at weekends and bank holidays.

Website: www.cnwl.nhs.uk/blog/improving-crisis-care-new-single-out-of-hours-number-launches

Clinical Health Psychology

Northwick Park Hospital, Watford Road, Harrow HA1 3UJ

Tel: 020 8869 2320

Website: www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/northwick-park-hospital-clinical-health-psychology

Helplines

Association for Post Natal Illness

Address: 145 Dawes Road, London SW6 7EB

Helpline: 020 7386 0868 (Mon and Fri 10am-2pm)

E-mail: info@apni.org

Website: www.apni.org

Advice and information for women with postnatal depression, families and friends.

CRY-SIS

Address: BM Cry-sis, London, WC1N 3XX

Helpline: 08451 228 669 (every day 9am-10pm)

E-mail: info@cry-sis.org.uk

Website: www.cry-sis.org.uk

Support for families with babies and children that are demanding or cry excessively, and have sleep problems.

National Services

National Childbirth Trust (NCT)

Alexandra House, Oldham Terrace, London, W3 6NH

Helpline: 0300 350 0700

Email: enquiries@national-childbirth-trust.co.uk

Website: www.nct.org.uk

Support and information regarding pregnancy, childbirth and early parenthood. Callers are placed in contact with counsellors and/or local and regional support groups, including caesarean and miscarriage groups. This service also offers post-natal exercise groups and antenatal teaching; books and leaflets.

Family Action – Adult Mental Health & Wellbeing

501-505 Kingsland Road, London, E8 4AU

Tel: 020 7254 6251

Email: info@family-action.org.uk

Website: <https://www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/adult-mental-health-and-wellbeing/>

Therapy for parents, and play therapy for children

The Breastfeeding Network

PO Box 11126, Paisley, PA2 8YB

National Breastfeeding Helpline: 0300 100 0212

0300 456 2421 for information in Bengali/Sylheti; 0300 330 5469 for information in Tamil, Telugu & Hindi

Email: Admin@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk

Website: www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk

Information for women who are breastfeeding

Websites

Birth Trauma Association

Website: www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk

Supports women who have experienced traumatic childbirth.

PND Productions

Website: www.postnataldepression.com

Tips for the partners of those who experience postnatal depression

National Mind

Website: <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/postnatal-depression/#.VBLWr5RdWyo>

For more information on postnatal depression please read Mind's 'Understanding Postnatal Depression' or order the booklet.

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