

Postnatal Depression

Postnatal depression is the name given to depression that develops between one month and up to one year after the birth of a baby. It affects about 1 in every 7 women who give birth in Australia each year. All parents go through a period of adjustment as they try to handle the huge changes a baby brings. For most people, this time of adjustment will be temporary and will not be overly distressing.

Many women experience the 'baby blues' in the first few days after having a baby. The baby blues usually only last 2 to 3 days and you might feel teary, anxious and moody during that time. The support of your partner, family and friends is usually enough to help you get through it. When these feelings last beyond these early days and continue to get worse, it may be a sign of developing depression.

What are the signs of Postnatal Depression?

There are many signs that someone may be struggling with postnatal depression.

Some of the more common ones include:

having a very low mood

feeling inadequate and a failure as a mother

having a sense of hopelessness about the future

feeling exhausted, empty, sad and teary

feeling guilty, ashamed or worthless

feeling anxious or panicky

having trouble sleeping, sleep for too long or have nightmares

worrying excessively about their baby

feeling scared of being alone or going out

In some cases, women may experience thoughts about leaving their family or worried that their partner may leave them. They could also have ideas about self-harm or doing harm to their partner or baby. In situations like this, you

should seek professional help straight away. It is also common to experience symptoms of anxiety at the same time as depression.

How is Postnatal Depression Diagnosed?

If you've had any of these symptoms for 2 weeks or more, talk to your doctor or midwife. You can also visit your local mental health service or community health service. Postnatal depression needs to be properly diagnosed and managed by a trained healthcare professional.

Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale

The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) is a questionnaire that asks about your feelings and symptoms. The EPDS indicates whether you may have some symptoms that are common with depression and anxiety.

See the link to the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale survey in Lifeskills Plus.

Treating Postnatal Depression

A range of different treatments can help with postnatal depression, including:

counselling

support strategies

psychotherapy

medications such as antidepressants

group treatment

Support from family and friends is also important.

Postnatal Psychosis

Postnatal psychosis (also called postpartum or puerperal psychosis) is less common than postnatal depression and can develop in the first week, or up to 12 weeks, after childbirth. It involves having difficulties thinking clearly, extreme mood swings, seeing or hearing things that are not there (hallucinations), feeling everyone is against you (paranoia) and powerful delusions (beliefs that clearly conflict with reality).

This is a medical emergency, and a doctor should be contacted immediately.

Postnatal Depression and Fathers

Postnatal depression is not limited to mothers. Fathers can have postnatal depression too, either along with their partner's postnatal depression or by themselves. Most people know that depression and anxiety can affect women during pregnancy and early parenthood, but men can also be at risk. Up to 1 in 10 new dads can experience depression during the pregnancy or after the birth.

Depression in men is not necessarily the result of their partner experiencing similar feelings. Although postnatal depression in mums may indicate the dad having it too, it doesn't always happen this way. Depression in new fathers can begin during the pregnancy and increase after the birth of the child. New fathers don't access the sort of services that new mothers do.

They don't tend to see their doctor, maternal and child health nurse or midwife, which is where problems are often picked up in women. As with women, it's important that depression in fathers is recognised and treated early and effectively. This will help avoid long-term effects on the father's mental health and his relationships with his partner, children, family and friends.

Risk Factors for Paternal Depression

Some of the known risk factors associated with depression in fathers (paternal depression) include:

- a man's partner experiencing postnatal depression
- a previous history of depression
- relationship problems
- low self-esteem
- feelings of incompetence in the parenting role
- first-time fatherhood
- an unsettled baby Paternal depression can affect men of all ages, personality types and financial status.

Symptoms of Paternal Depression

Some of the symptoms associated with postnatal depression in men include:

- tiredness, headaches and pain
- irritability, anxiety and anger
- loss of libido
- changes in appetite
- feelings of being overwhelmed, out of control and unable to cope
- a tendency to take risks
- changes to sleep patterns, especially a lack of sleep
- feelings of isolation and disconnection from partner, friends or family
- increased hours of work as a part of the withdrawal from family
- increased use of drugs or alcohol instead of seeking treatment for depression

Where can I go for advice and support?

If you think that you or your partner may be experiencing postnatal depression, you should speak to your doctor. Often a man's friends are the first to notice symptoms of depression, such as not turning up to social events or being unusually cranky or down. If you notice these symptoms in a mate, you can try asking your friend about his feelings. Let him know you're there for him and that he should think about getting help.

Please call 1800 870 080 to book your appointment for support with Postnatal Depression