

Post Natal Depression



"Nobody told me it would be like this"

Being a mother is one of the hardest jobs we ever take on and yet we do so with very little training or expertise.

For many, being a new mother is a tiring yet joyful and precious time in our life, but for others this is not how they experience it. For a large number of women the experience of motherhood is one of living in a grey cloud or fog, experiencing feelings of hopelessness and despair. Some women find their days and nights roll into one and they are left numb and detached or anxious and angry. We often hear the phrase 'no one ever told me it was going to be like this'. The bottom line is, with help it doesn't have to be.



Baby Blues



Nearly all women are aware of the 'Baby Blues'. However more than 20% of women will have a persistence of or a resurgence of these feelings. Anyone can be affected by Postnatal Depression (PND) but we are aware that some factors make a woman more at risk of experiencing PND, such as:

- Previous history of depression or anxiety prior to or during pregnancy
- Complications of pregnancy (high blood pressure etc.)
- Unplanned pregnancy
- Difficulties with conception or assisted conception
- Single mothers
- Traumatic labour/birth or intervention (Emergency caesarean section)
- Multiple births
- Stressful life or family events such as moving, loss of job or death of someone close.
- Relationship problems
- Isolation, lack of support or confiding relationship
- Health problems
- Previous miscarriage, stillbirth or cot death.



What are the symptoms of PND?

TPND can begin very soon after birth or anytime within the first year. Although we have no definite data on the exact cause of PND we are aware the factors above make a new mother far more susceptible. Everyone's experience is different, but constant feelings of lowness of mood and no longer being able to find pleasure in things that previously gave you pleasure, are a common thread.

The following symptoms are internationally recognised as criteria for depressive disorder. If a woman experiences the feelings described above plus some of the feelings listed most days for a 2 week period. This can be considered as PND.

- **Weight loss or gain (without dieting)**
- **Change in appetite**
- **Inability to sleep (even when able) or constantly wanting to sleep**
- **Waking very early then unable to go back to sleep**
- **Fatigue or loss of energy**
- **Agitation and restlessness (that others may notice)**
- **Unable to concentrate or make decisions**
- **Feelings of worthlessness and guilt**
- **Thoughts that you are not a good mother or caring properly for your baby**
- **Thoughts of death, suicide for yourself or the baby**

Many of the symptoms described above are common to new mothers like weight and dietary changes, feeling tired from broken sleep and difficulty making decisions. After all, your first priority is your baby.

But if these symptoms occur most of the time, with greater frequency, or someone close to you notices changes in your behaviour or demeanor, consider seeking help.





What to do

If you feel like this, or you think your partner/loved one feels like this, then you should seek professional help. A good start is to talk to your midwife, doctor or health professional. They in turn may suggest starting treatment or refer you to someone who specialises in this field.

Telling someone is a great start, many women feel a sense of relief by taking this step. Treatment may sometimes be necessary and come in the form of counselling and or medication but both may take time. Some measures can be taken easily to aid the road to recovery:

- Ask for and accept constructive help (i.e. house cleaning or shopping)
 - Do something everyday that makes you happy
 - Eat well, fresh fruit and vegetables, cut back on caffeine and alcohol
 - Exercise, we make our own “feel-good” hormones (endorphins) with exercise
 - Get outside, the sun’s rays induce happy feelings
 - Massage, aromatherapy or yoga
 - Professional help in baby care, breastfeeding and sleeping strategies
- Join a local mother’s support group

PND is a diagnosis given to one person but the effect and the treatment is a family affair. There is a trickle-down effect that will not only impact the new baby but the other significant people in a woman’s life. Partners and other children are themselves experiencing a time of transition and adjustment and therefore need to be considered in the management and treatment of PND.

The first step is always the hardest. The way we view the issues of mental health and what we expect from women in today’s society can be a challenge. So start with baby steps and tell someone close to you (partner, friend, midwife or GP) as navigating all the challenges of being a new Mum can be overwhelming!

