

AWARE

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

HELPING YOU
WITH POSTNATAL
DEPRESSION

Perinatal depression is a general term for depression experienced while pregnant or after giving birth. Antenatal and Postnatal Depression (PND) affect about 10-15% of women. (Royal College of Psychiatrists)

Although hormonal changes during pregnancy and after childbirth can trigger mood changes, only some women develop PND, so hormonal changes are unlikely to be the sole cause.

There is no single cause of PND.

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Look Out for the Signs

Signs include tiredness, a loss of confidence and self-esteem, anxiety and irritability. But you may not have strong feelings of sadness or unhappiness with PND. This may deter you from seeking help as you attribute these symptoms to sleep loss and the demands of the new baby.

Is PND different from 'baby blues'?

The 'baby blues' are experienced by about 60% of women, usually starting on the third day after birth. Symptoms include feeling tearful and/or irritable for little or no reason. These feelings are due to hormonal changes and usually pass within a few days. PND usually starts a few weeks after the birth and lasts longer.



Are You at Risk?

You are more likely to develop PND if you:

- Previously experienced mental ill-health, either during pregnancy or not.
- Have little support from family or friends.
- Have experienced a recent stressful event such as a bereavement, break-up or job loss.
- Are currently experiencing issues such as relationship or financial trouble.

? DID YOU KNOW

Fathers and partners may also experience postnatal depression. Research indicates that depression rates for men in the first year following childbirth can significantly increase. The number of men who become depressed in the first year after becoming a dad is double that of the general population. (NCT)

How Does PND Affect You?

You may experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- **Feelings of anxiety:** Worrying about your baby is normal, but with postnatal depression, those worries can feel overwhelming. You might fear your baby is unwell, not thriving, or even have distressing thoughts. You may also worry about your health or doubt you'll ever feel better.
- **Irritability:** With your partner, baby or other children.
- **Tiredness:** All new mothers get tired, but depression can make you feel exhausted and lacking energy.
- **Feeling sad or tearful:** This may get worse at certain times of the day.
- **Sleeplessness:** Being unable to fall asleep despite feeling tired. Lying awake worrying or waking during the night even when your baby is sleeping, or even waking too early before your baby.
- **Appetite changes:** Poor appetite, forgetting to eat, or eating for comfort and feeling guilty.
- **Loss of enjoyment:** Not enjoying or feeling interested in anything, even your baby.
- **A loss of libido:** No interest or reduced interest in sex.
- **Negative thinking:** You may think things like 'I'm a bad mother', 'I can't cope', or 'I don't love my baby', leading to feelings of guilt.

Mild, Moderate or Severe?

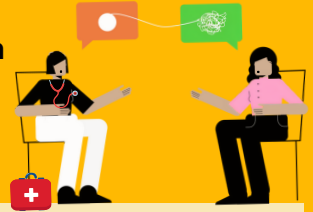
The number and severity of symptoms will determine whether the depression is diagnosed as mild, moderate or severe.

A very small number of women with severe depression may develop psychotic symptoms. They may hear voices or have unusual beliefs. If you believe you or someone you love may be experiencing this, contact your GP right away. This is very treatable, and everything will be done to ensure you and your baby can stay together.



What Helps for Postnatal Depression?

Mild PND can get better with time and good support, but you should still see your GP or health visitor so that the symptoms can be monitored. They can help you decide if you need treatment and which is right for you.



PSYCHOTHERAPY/TALKING THERAPIES

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has been proven very effective for mild/moderate depression and in preventing relapse. It works on the basis that if you change your unhelpful thinking patterns and behaviour, it will improve how you feel. Self-help books based on CBT, as well as computerised forms of therapy and counselling, might also help. Ask your GP to tell you about them. Any of these may be used with or without medication.

MEDICATION

Antidepressants are the most commonly prescribed and effective treatments for moderate or severe depression. It is important, however, to take them exactly as prescribed and only to stop taking them as and when advised by your GP. They are not addictive, but stopping them suddenly or too soon may cause a relapse. They work by boosting certain brain chemicals that affect your mood. Any side effects usually disappear or are tolerable, although you should tell your GP as soon as possible if you experience them.

Other Self-Help Strategies

- Eat well and regularly, getting a balanced diet.**
- Stay active; ask your health visitor if there are mother and baby exercise classes near you to join.**
- Avoid alcohol and non-prescribed drugs, especially while pregnant or breastfeeding, as it can harm your baby, sticking to safe recommended limits.**
- Plan rest time for you and take every opportunity to get some sleep or rest. If you can, ask for help with night time feeds, and try to sleep when your baby sleeps.**
- Try to stick to a routine, going to bed and rising at approximately the same time each day.**



The 5 most evidence-based steps to improving your mental health are:



1. Be Active

Our bodies release feel-good hormones when we're active that can also reduce anxiety and stress, and help us sleep better.



2. Take Notice

Savour the moment, be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.



3. Give

Do something nice for a loved one or stranger. Smile, volunteer your time, or consider joining a community group.



4. Connect

With the people around you - family, friends or neighbours. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.



5. Keep Learning

Do not be afraid to try something new. Rediscover an old hobby or interest, or simply set a challenge you will enjoy.



Do One Thing:

Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed when taking steps to help yourself. But remember to focus on doing just one thing at a time. It will help you reach the goals you set and give you a real sense of achievement.

Who to Contact for Support



Lifeline

A telephone help and counselling service for anyone in distress. It is available 24/7 and free to call.

They can give you immediate support, offer face-to-face appointments, or give you information about other services in your area. **Call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.**

You could also:

- See your GP or call the out-of-hours GP service
- Go to the A&E department
- Call emergency services on 999
- Call Samaritans on their freephone helpline 116 123 - a confidential listening service for those in distress

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You can read our guides for more information on support with postnatal depression and looking after your mental health. **Contact us by emailing info@aware-ni.org and visit our website at aware-ni.org**

AWARE NI also have FREE mental health support groups for anyone aged 18 or over. You can find your nearest one by searching: aware-ni.org/support-groups/

