

Understanding postnatal depression (PND)

PND and symptoms

As a new mother you will feel a range of emotions and sometimes these can include low mood, anxiety, tearful and irritable. If these emotions are not severe and only last a couple of weeks after the birth, you are likely to be experiencing what is commonly known as “baby blues”. These symptoms will be manageable although you may wish to mention them to your midwife or health visitor for reassurance.

If the symptoms are severe or last for more than two weeks and are having an impact on day to day life, you may be experiencing postnatal depression. This can occur between a couple of months up to a year after the birth. Symptoms can also include lack of energy, change of appetite, negative thoughts, and being unable to cope with daily activities looking after the baby.

On rare occasions a new mother will experience puerperal psychosis. It usually starts a few weeks after the birth and the mother will have rapid mood swings, may be confused and disorientated, have delusions (believing things are not true) and hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there). This condition requires urgent medical attention.

Causes of PND

There is no one cause for PND and it can happen whatever their family circumstances and whether or not the baby is your first. There are some possibilities that are considered to be associated with PND including a difficult birth, worries brought on by the event e.g. money or relationship concerns, or a history of personal or family depression.

Treatment for PND

If you think you are experiencing PND or have any worries or concerns, your GP and health visitor are there to listen to your concerns and support you. If the diagnosis is PND, they may offer talking therapies such as cognitive behaviour therapy or interpersonal therapy. These help you to understand your feelings and how to cope with them. You may also be prescribed medication or a combination of these methods of support.

There are also areas of self help for PND including regular healthy eating, gentle exercise, accepting help from family and friends. There are also support organisations listed below that offer helplines, support groups and information to help you to cope with your personal situation.

Support organisations

Panda's foundation – offers a helpline, leaflets and self help advice.

www.pandasfoundation.org.uk

Tel: 0843 289 8401

The association for postnatal illness – provides support for mothers with PND

www.apni.org

Tel: 020 7386 0868

Home-start – offers local support networks for families with young children

www.home-start.org.uk

Tel: 0117 950 1170 (local Bristol group)

National childbirth trust – offer practical and emotional support in all areas of pregnancy, birth and early parenthood

www.nct.org.uk

Tel: 0300 330 0700

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