

The Spires Centre, Children's Hospital

What is Postnatal Depression?



What is Postnatal Depression (PND)?

It is considered normal to feel in a low mood (sad, down) 2-4 days after the birth of your child. This is known as the “baby blues” and is thought to be due to exhaustion (over tiredness) and hormone changes associated with childbirth. In this time, you are likely to feel very emotional, sad, anxious, guilty and afraid that you are not up to being a mother.

Although the baby blues are distressing, they only tend to last a few days. If your low mood lasts longer or gets worse, then it may be turning into postnatal depression (PND). PND lasts much longer and is more serious than the baby blues.

If you develop postnatal depression it is important for you to know that this condition is common and affects 1 in 10 mothers.

Signs and symptoms of PND

PND isn't just “feeling sad”. It can also cause lots of other symptoms, which may include:

- feeling low, anxious or tearful
- thoughts of being a hopeless or worthless mother
- feelings of guilt, e.g. that you're not coping, or that you don't love your baby enough
- being unusually irritable, such as acting with hostility or indifference towards your partner or baby
- tiredness and a lack of energy; not wanting to do anything or take any interest in activities
- loss of interest in sex
- difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep, unrelated to the baby
- increased or decreased appetite, feeling hungry all the time, or not wanting to eat

- difficulties concentrating on things, e.g. finding it difficult to follow conversations or a television programme
- difficulty making decisions
- overly fearful for the health of your baby, yourself or other family members
- thoughts about death and suicide.

What causes PND?

PND can happen whatever your family circumstances and whether or not this is your first baby.

Scientists have not found one cause for PND, but a number of possibilities for why mothers may become depressed in this way have been suggested, including:

- being depressed before
- not having a supportive partner
- having a premature or sick baby
- losing your own mother when you were a child
- experience of recent life stresses such as unemployment, bereavement, money and house problems.

If your baby is born with a cleft lip or palate then you will obviously experience the extra stress of hospital appointments, the prospects of surgery etc. But this does not mean that all mothers of babies with a cleft lip or palate will get PND.

Treatment

Experts suggest that the best treatment for PND may be a combination of practical support, advice, counselling or psychotherapy, and if necessary anti-depressants.

Many mothers worry that if they tell someone about their problems, then their child will be taken away from them. This is not the case. Instead, health care professionals believe that the best place for a child is with their parents. We will do our best to offer you as much support as possible to enable you to look after your baby.

Helping yourself overcome PND

When you are feeling low, it can be difficult to imagine how life could be different, or to find a way out of the depression. However, there are treatments that do work. There are also important things that you can do at home, which will help, including:

- talking to someone about how you feel, such as your partner, your specialist cleft nurse, midwife, friends, or other mothers
- making time to look after yourself, not just everyone else!
- learning relaxation techniques
- taking up other people's offers of help
- increasing your positive thoughts
- allowing yourself time to rest
- eating well and getting regular exercise
- treating yourself!

Information for partners, friends and family

Love, support and nurture from friends, family and partners can be vital in helping a mother to cope with PND. They may need encouragement and support from you to seek help.

- Try to reassure her that these scary and difficult feelings are not unusual for mothers and that she is going to get better.
- Don't tell her to pull herself together – she is already feeling bad about herself and is doing her best. Instead make sure that she knows that you will support her and help her get through this difficult time.
- On the practical side, support her to make sure she's getting enough food, rest and exercise, and also help with housework, shopping, feeding and changing the baby etc.
- Try to make sure that she doesn't spend too much time alone caring for the baby – a sense of isolation is often the most stressful part of mothering.
- Be prepared to talk about how she's feeling, so that the problem does not remain invisible.
- And remember, help received from those who care will be appreciated long after the depression is over.

Listening

A poem from Sherri Hardy.

On the outside looking in
You see a smile and all is well
Yet if you look a little closer
You'd see the pain in which I dwell.

You ask me how I am
But the truth you do not seek
For I show you my pain
You do not let me speak.

On the outside looking in
I see the joy in others' lives
I wonder where my joy has gone
Its absence hurts my eyes.

Through the haze I see the days go by
And I watch my child grow
I fear my acts will scar her
Or is she just too young to know.

My child is so precious to me
The most beautiful thing I've seen
I love her more than life itself
And yet sometimes I'm so mean.

I don't know why I get so angry
When her cries are just her speech
She does not deserve my anger
Or my attitude of defeat

You tell me she's a good baby
Don't you think I already know?
Your words just drive the pain harder
When all I want is to let go.

Why are you so scared to hear
The truth behind the smile?
I need for you to understand
To listen for a while.

It is the illness that I suffer
A bad person I am not
As a mother I do my very best
I give it everything I have got.

In time I will be well again
But for now I need you here
For a shoulder just to cry on
Or an understanding ear.

Useful Organizations

The Spires Cleft Centre

Level LG1

The Children's Hospital

John Radcliffe Hospital

Tel: 01865 231 450

www.spirescentre.nhs.uk

The Association of Postnatal Illness

This provides support for mothers with PND

Tel: 020 7386 0868

www.apni.org

Home-Start

Supporting families in the local communities across the UK

Tel: 0800 068 6368

www.home-start.org.uk

MAMA (Meet a Mum Association)

Offers one to one support groups, especially for isolated mothers.

Tel: 0845 120 3746

www.mama.co.uk

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call

01865 221473 or email **PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk**

Louise Dalton

The Spires Centre

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Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust

Oxford OX3 9DU

www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs/patientinformation