

Postnatal Depression - Depression After Having a Baby

This pamphlet is designed to answer some questions you may have about postnatal depression, its causes and how it can be treated.

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Where can I get more information or advice?

If you have concerns about experiencing postnatal depression you can discuss these concerns with:

- Your family doctor
- Child and Family Nurses at the Early Childhood Centre
- The Mothersafe Hotline (Royal Hospital for Women)
(02) 9382 6111
(02) 9382 6539

You can also get information on the internet on sites such as:

- www.motherisk.org
- www.beyondblue.org.au

What is Postnatal Depression?

Postnatal depression refers to depression occurring in the months following childbirth. Women are more likely to develop emotional problems, particularly anxiety and depression, following childbirth than at any other time in their lives. Postnatal depression is common and affects up to 1 in 7 women.

The birth of a child is a joyful event but it is often one of life's biggest challenges for a woman and her family. There are many myths and pressures associated with motherhood. These can lead a woman and her partner to feel ashamed to admit that they are having trouble coping.

Symptoms of Postnatal Depression

Not every woman with postnatal depression will have the same symptoms but some common ones are:

- Feeling sad, crying easily or crying often
- Feeling irritable, anxious or unable to relax
- Feeling disconnected from your baby, family or friends
- Fear of being alone
- Feeling unable to cope with simple things
- Being overly worried about your baby's health or feeding or overly worried about how clean the house is
- Having thoughts or fears about harming your child or about your child becoming very ill or contaminated by germs
- Becoming forgetful or having trouble remembering things or concentrating
- Losing your appetite
- Feeling tired all the time and not refreshed by rest
- Not caring about your personal hygiene
- Sleeping poorly, having nightmares or waking frequently even when your baby is asleep
- Thoughts that life is not worth living or that people would be better off without you

Causes of Postnatal Depression

Postnatal Depression is a common illness but complex illness with many causes. The causes include the enormous changes in a woman's body and in her hormones during pregnancy, delivery and after birth. The physical exhaustion and lack of sleep from having to look after a young baby may also be part of developing Postnatal Depression. The arrival of a baby can bring many other changes including financial stress, social isolation from family and friends and changes in relationships – partners are now parents. These changes can be particularly hard for women who have come from overseas. Living away from family and traditional support networks while adjusting to parenthood in a different culture, with different parenting practices, can be particularly stressful.

Treatment for Postnatal Depression

Postnatal Depression is often unrecognised by mothers and those closest to them. However, once recognised and given the appropriate time and treatment, a woman can recover from Postnatal Depression.

If a woman experiences Postnatal Depression for a long period of time and is not treated, it can lead to chronic depression, anxiety and low-self esteem. It can have a negative effect on the baby's development and her relationships with her partner and family.

Treatments for Postnatal Depression include:

- Increasing social support
- Practical advice about a woman's self-care and baby-care
- Counselling
- Medication