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Post Natal Depression

**SPOT
THE
SIGNS!**



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What is Post Natal Depression?

It is a depressive illness that occurs after having a baby. It is common for women following childbirth to experience a period of 'low' mood. This can range in severity from mild feelings – sometimes called 'baby blues', through to Post Natal Depression.

Who Gets It?

Between 10% and 15% of new mothers get PND. It is more common in mothers who have previously had depression. A history of depression in family members also increases the risk.

PND is also more common in mothers who have experienced stressful life events during the pregnancy, those who do not have support, and when the baby has been born with some problem.

Men can also get PND so if you are a Dad suffering from the symptoms, seek help.

When Does PND start?

Usually within the first months following childbirth. It may develop on from severe 'baby blues'.

How is it different to 'Baby Blues'?

Baby Blues occurs within the first few days when hormones are settling down after the birth and pregnancy. Post Natal Depression is a long term problem that needs help.

What are the symptoms?

These are similar to Depression:-

- Feeling low, and tearful for no apparent reason. These feelings persist for most of the time and may be worse at certain times of the day – particularly the morning.
- Being unable to enjoy yourself. This may be prominent in new mothers who feel they are not enjoying having the baby in the way they expected to.
- Irritability is common. This may be with other children, the new baby and particularly with the partner.
- Sleep disturbance is part of looking after a new baby. With PND there may be additional problems such as finding it hard to go to sleep even though you are tired, or waking early in the morning.
- Mothers often feel they have no energy. This can be even worse in mothers with PND.
- Appetite is sometimes affected, with mothers not being interested in food. This can be a particular problem since new mothers need all energy to look after the baby.
- Anxiety frequently occurs in PND. This may take many forms. It may be feeling tense and 'on edge' all the time. Normal concerns and anxieties that any mother feels for a new baby may become overwhelming. In addition mothers may experience

'panic attacks' which are episodes lasting several minutes when they feel as if something catastrophic is about to happen. These are extremely frightening.

- Depression is often accompanied by feelings of being 'worthless' and 'hopeless'. These feelings are common in PND. All mothers are faced with new and sometimes difficult problems with a new baby. However, mothers with PND feel all the more unable to cope and unable to see a way through their difficulties.

- Thoughts of suicide are not uncommon. When people are depressed, they sometimes feel that there is no way out of their problems and that they would be better off dead.

Can Post Natal Depression be treated?

Yes. It is treated in much the same way as ordinary depression. Therapy, psychological help, support and possibly medication. Anti depressants can be prescribed and advice might include talking the problem through, and getting extra help and support with the baby.

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What should you do if you think you may have PND?

- Talk about the problem with somebody such as a health visitor or your GP – Don't bottle it up and don't be afraid you will be judged to be a bad mother.
- Some mothers think they will be deemed 'unfit' and their child taken from them if they seek help. This is not the case.
- Remember PND is common, and it is Not Your Fault.
- By telling your GP or health visitor you will get the help you need, and it will help you deal better with the stresses of motherhood.
- Another condition to look out for is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - if there has been a particularly difficult birth, and perhaps during it the mother believed that she or the baby may die, the memory of it may cause Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The sufferer may then avoid the source of the stress - ie the baby, or there may be sexual problems.
- Men can also get Post Natal Depression so if you're a Dad with the symptoms described on the previous page, then seek help.

Tips for new mothers to reduce stress

- Having a baby is tiring and stressful and you may not be able to manage all the things you did before the birth.
- Reduce your commitments and make your life easier on yourself.
- Accept help when it is offered. If you need more help, ask.
- Take any opportunity you can to get some sleep.
- Try and keep to your normal diet – you need all the energy you can get!
- Involve your partner. Having a baby can be difficult for him too.
- Try to get some time to yourself, and some time for just you and your partner.
- Talk to other mums with new babies – you will find that they also feel many of the same feelings you do.

Get Help! The Association for Postnatal Depression
145 Dawes Road, Fulham, London, SW6 7EB
Helpline 020 7386 0868 www.apni.org

