

How to reduce your chances of getting Postnatal Depression

Factsheet 4

Congratulations! Having a baby is such an exciting time and it can also affect us in ways that we don't expect. Whilst nothing can prepare you for all the changes and challenges of parenthood, if you are aware of the risk factors for Postnatal Depression you can take steps to prevent it. If you still have any further questions, do email us at



Facts about Postnatal Depression

- At least 1 out of every 10 women will develop postnatal depression.
- No one knows exactly what causes postnatal depression, however there are certain risk factors that make it more likely.
- Postnatal Depression is NOT the baby blues, and in most cases it is not caused by a chemical imbalance.
- Postnatal Depression is different to Postnatal Anxiety (which is just as common) and other postnatal mental health disorders, although they can overlap.
- Postnatal Depression can come at any stage in the first years of your baby's life, from 2 weeks up until at least a year after your baby is born.

What are the risk factors for Postnatal Depression?*

Experiencing these does NOT mean that you will necessarily experience Postnatal Depression. What it means is that if you have experience of any of the following, you might want to think about what strategies and supports you can put in place.

Social Risk factors

- Domestic violence or experiencing other kinds of abuse at any stage in your life**
- Negative life events (e.g. job loss, bereavement)**
- Low social support**
- Low partner support or marital difficulties**
- If you are a refugee, asylum seeker or have immigrated**

Psychological Risk Factors

- Depression or unhappiness in pregnancy**
- Anxiety in pregnancy**
- A previous history of depression**
- Substance misuse**
- A negative experience of birth***

Biological Risk factors

- Having twins, triplets or other multiples**
- Chronic illness or medical illness**

*These are only proven to be risk factors for Postnatal depression, not any other mood disorder

**Non-psychotic mental disorders in the perinatal period, Howard, Louise M et al, The Lancet, Volume 384, Issue 9956*

***Anecdotal evidence.

What you can do to reduce the likelihood of getting PND

It can be scary to think that you might get postnatal depression, and there are things that you can do during pregnancy that are proven to help reduce the chance that it will happen to you:

1. Speak to your midwife, GP or health visitor about any concerns you might have. They might be able to provide you with information about local organisations that can provide practical support after birth, link you to peer support groups, or offer you psychological support.
2. Have a lot of support around you in the early months. This can be formal or informal (i.e. you can pay for practical support such as a doula, or else you might have a friends or family members who can come and help out regularly). You might also consider getting some help with housework and meal preparation.
3. Counselling during pregnancy (not CBT) has been shown to reduce the likelihood of getting postnatal depression.
4. Regular physical activity before and after birth has also been shown to reduce the likelihood. *[There is currently not enough research about the following tips, however the evidence is growing that these all have an impact on your mood after your baby is born.]*
5. There is increasing evidence that synthetic oxytocin (sometimes used to induce babies) can increase your chances of postnatal depression. It might be worth speaking to your health professionals about alternatives to this if necessary.
6. There is also increasing evidence that your experience of birth is important to your mental health after birth. Therefore it is good to take steps to ensure that you have a good birth experience, whether that's getting information about care pathways, learning more about managing labour pain, or hiring a doula or independent midwife to help you stay calm during birth. You can also look at our fact sheet on 'Giving Birth in Edinburgh and the Lothians'.
7. Plan to include activities that are shown to promote bonding after birth, such as plenty of skin to skin, making the 'golden hour' part of your plan, baby massage and carrying your baby in a sling.
8. Isolation has a big effect on mood, and is a common experience for new mothers. Since it can be easier to link with people before your baby is born, joining antenatal groups such for yoga or birth preparation, and making plans to stay in touch.
9. Plan to get support (either paid or unpaid) to get more sleep when your baby is a few months old. Sleep is known to affect mood and sleep deprivation is cumulative, so it is not until your baby is older that you might need more support.

Useful resources, helplines and self help

Juno Perinatal Mental Health Support supports mothers before and after birth through their peer support groups. They also have a fantastic list of resources for different kinds of support:

<https://www.juno.uk.com/useful-telephone-helplines/>

Other Charities in Edinburgh that support Mums specifically with postnatal depression are [Crossreach](#) and [Lifeline](#).

The NHS provides a list of self-help resources, which might be useful if you are unsure about whether you want any other support:

<https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/Self-help->

If you have a specific question or would like to find out more about counselling, please contact Sarah@birthandbeyond.com For other enquiries about anything birth or baby related, please visit our website – <http://www.edinburghbirthandbaby.com>

