



POST-PARTUM (PERINATAL DEPRESSION) AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Perinatal depression refers to depressions that can occur in a woman at a time around the birth of a child. The depression can either occur before the birth (antenatal depression) or after the birth (postnatal or postpartum depression).

It's a common problem, affecting more than 1 in every 10 women within a year of giving birth. It can also affect fathers and partners.

Feeling a bit down and low following the birth of the baby is very common and often referred to as the 'baby blues'. The mother may feel weepy and weep at the slightest thing. This is caused by the dramatic change in hormones that occurs. Often the mother says they have no idea what is causing them to weep, yet they do whether it's about something happy or sad. They have no control over it. This usually occurs a few days after the birth. A mother may know that this is supposed to be a happy time so may feel guilty about both the way they are feeling and the tears. When these feelings last more than two weeks it may be the sign of the beginnings of a depressive illness.

The symptoms don't initially differ from depression at other times. However, this type of depression has an impact not only on the mother but also on the relationship she may have with the baby. This can affect the child's development and, it is for this reason, it is important she gets good support and an early medical intervention.

Factors that may contribute to perinatal depression are the hormonal and physical change which result from the pregnancy, the childbirth and the sudden responsibilities of caring for a new born.

Postpartum psychosis is a serious but rare mental health problem which develops after you give birth. It is sometimes called puerperal psychosis.

Postpartum psychosis can be an overwhelming and frightening experience, and it is important to seek help as soon as possible if you experience symptoms. With the right support, most people fully recover.

Signs that you or someone you know might be depressed include:

- A persistent feeling of sadness and low mood.
- Lack of enjoyment and loss of interest in the wider world.
- Lack of energy and feeling tired all the time.
- Trouble sleeping at night and feeling sleepy during the day.
- Difficulty bonding with your baby.
- Withdrawing from contact with other people.
- Problems concentrating and making decisions.
- Frightening thoughts – for example, about hurting your baby.

Many women do not realise they have postnatal depression, because it can develop gradually. Postnatal depression can be lonely, distressing and frightening, but support and effective treatments are available.

Do speak to a GP or your health visitor if you think you may be depressed.

- Many health visitors have been trained to recognise postnatal depression and have techniques that can help.
- If they cannot help, they'll know someone in your area who can.
- Encourage your partner to seek help if you think they might be having problems.
- Do not struggle alone hoping that the problem will go away.

As with other types of Mental Illness, with early intervention recovery is both possible and very likely.

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