

# Caring for your emotional wellbeing after becoming a parent

## Maternity Services

Information for Patients

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## Introduction

Having a baby and becoming a parent is a major life event. It changes your home life, social life and relationships. Parents of a new baby have a lot of feelings after the birth. You may feel happy and proud of yourself, or just be glad the birth is over.

**This information should help you decide if the emotions you (or your partner) have are usual or if you may need to get some extra help.**

We are not always able to get completely ready for the changes pregnancy and becoming a parent brings. It can be difficult to find time for yourself, your partner or your family when you have to deal with the non-stop demands of a new baby. Meeting your baby's needs can be rewarding, but can also feel stressful.

At the end of this leaflet there is a list of useful support groups and organisations for parents.

## Important things to remember

### Try not to expect too much of yourself or your partner

It is likely that during the first few weeks and months of parenthood you will feel a mixture of emotions.

### It is important you talk honestly to your partner, friends or family about how you feel

You should try to look after yourself. Ask for support as soon as possible. Feeling stressed or low in mood can sometimes affect your relationship with your baby. Do not be afraid to ask for help.

Becoming a parent means you are learning new skills. You also have new events.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## **No one knows right away how to be a parent....here are a few things to remember:**

### **Postnatal mood changes**

As many as 8 out of 10 women have the 'baby blues'. It normally begin within a few days of the baby's birth.

Crying for no obvious reason, or feeling on top of the world 1 minute and miserable the next are common feelings. They may coincide with your milk "coming in" (whether you are breast feeding or not).

Remember that having a baby can turn your world upside down. In the first few weeks and months you may feel emotionally and physically drained. Becoming a parent for the first time can feel like a big responsibility.

If you think you are becoming more unhappy or upset, or if the low mood lasts for more than 1 week, you are probably having something other than the baby blues.

### **Getting to know your baby**

You may expect to love your baby right away, but for some people, this can take a while. Not loving your baby straight away does not mean that you are not a 'good' or 'natural' parent. Do not be too hard on yourself.

Remember that babies cry because they are totally dependant on their carers. When they are not near you, they may feel distressed and they cannot tell you what is wrong. Do not blame yourself because they are crying.

The following may help you to get to know you baby and develop feelings of love:

- enjoying time in skin-to-skin cuddles with your baby,
- talking to your baby
- doing things like learning to massage your baby

We all learn to be a parent when we actually have a baby, not before.

### **Taking care of yourself**

Give yourself plenty of time to adjust to your new life and find time to rest. Eat a good diet. This will help you stay physically and emotionally healthy.

Talk to someone you can trust about how you are feeling, like your partner, your parent, grandparent, a friend, or your midwife or health visitor. Sharing how you feel with someone can help and they can give you the support you feel you need.

Talk to your midwife, Health Visitor or doctor. Ask for help from these staff. Especially if you have had depression before.

Do not be afraid to ask for help. We never want to become unwell, but when we struggle with our emotional wellbeing it can make it more difficult to cope with everyday to day tasks. That is when we need to look for support and help. Trying to cope without support can sometimes cause

problems in how we care for our babies. Do not worry, we will not take your baby away. We will work with you to keep you together, either at home or in a supported place with trained care workers.

## Postnatal depression

Postnatal depression (PND) affects 1 in 10 women after the birth of their babies. This illness usually begins in the first 6 months after childbirth. For some women the depression may begin during pregnancy.

PND can occur at any time within the first year of the birth of your baby.

It can last for longer if you do not get help and treatment.

If postnatal depression is not treated it can lead to the breakdown of relationships with partners and children.

Early diagnosis and treatment of postnatal depression will result in a faster recovery.

Quite often a close family friend or your partner may see something is wrong before you do.

## Symptoms of postnatal depression

If you feel any of the following please talk to someone you feel you can trust. If this person is not your Midwife, Health Visitor or GP then please also ask to speak to them as soon as possible. They will be able to help you get well again.

The symptoms of postnatal depression are different for each person. There are many symptoms of depression. Feelings you may have include:

**Anxiety** - You may feel anxious or become obsessed with unjustified fears about your baby, yourself or your partner. You may only feel safe if someone is with you at all times.

**Panic attacks** - These can occur at any time, but they are most common in unpredictable situations. You may feel your heart beating faster, the palms of your hands becoming sweaty, feeling sick and even as though you are going to faint.

**Tension** - Changes to your appetite, no energy, headaches, blurred vision and stomach pains can all be signs of tension. They can be your body's way of saying something does not feel right. They can make it difficult to unwind and relax.

**Irritability** - You may lose your temper with your children, partner and others who cannot understand what they have done to trigger your anger.

**Lack of interest in sex** - For most women it takes some time for them to be interested in sex after their baby is born. They may need time to heal after the birth and may be too tired in the early weeks after the birth. But, with postnatal depression, it may take longer to regain an interest in a sexual relationship. This can add to your stress.

**Depression** - Feeling depressed can vary from feeling low and sad, to severe feelings, as if your whole world is an empty place and you are not able to look forward to things anymore. Your thoughts may be negative and focus on your failures and have no interest in everyday life. Going out might be difficult for you and you may even find talking to people is too much for you to do. You

may have some mixed emotions about your baby, and this can cause you some distress. You might even feel that your baby or partner would be better off without you.

**Exhaustion** - You may feel tired all the time, unable to cope with daily tasks and not be interested in your appearance and surroundings. You might have problems sleeping. Or, you might want to sleep all the time no matter how much sleep you have.

**Lack of concentration** - You may feel confused, finding it difficult to read or watch TV.

**Not able to make decisions** - Making simple decisions like what to wear may seem impossible.

**Strange thoughts** - For example, you may believe if you do not walk on the cracks in the pavement, your baby will sleep through the night, or if you do walk on the cracks your baby will die. This is known as 'magical thinking'. These thoughts can be very frightening. They can make you scared to tell anyone if you think your baby will be taken from you.

**Guilt** - You may feel that you should be 'grateful for your baby' and that you should just 'pull yourself together'. It is difficult. Sometimes the people who are nearest to you may be saying things and then you may feel ashamed and blame yourself. This is one of the most common feelings linked with depression. It is difficult to admit to feeling this way. It is not your fault. These are real emotions. They have happened because you have postnatal depression. **Remember you will get better.**

If you think you could be depressed, talk to your health care professional as soon as you can. Postnatal depression is an illness. It is not your fault. You would not expect a broken arm to get better without the help of a professional. Do not expect our feelings to get better without their help either.

## Causes of postnatal depression

Everyone is different, one or a mix of the following may cause you depression:

- Feeling that you have no one to confide in
- Relationship problems
- Living away from your family or feeling isolated
- The death of someone close to you
- You or your partner losing your job or other financial worries
- Housing problems
- Difficult pregnancy
- Difficult birth
- Feeling depressed in your pregnancy
- Illness of the baby or family member
- Unrealistic expectations of parenthood
- A previous or family history of depression
- Experiencing violence in the home or any other abuse, past or present.

It is difficult to predict just who will have PND. It is also possible to have PND without any of the above causes.

## Treatment options for postnatal depression

Finding postnatal depression early is important for recovery. The first and most important step is for you, your partner and your family to accept that this illness is temporary. With time you will recover.

The most helpful methods of treatment are talking therapies, such as counselling and psychotherapy, and medication in the form of antidepressants. These treatments can be combined.

### Counselling and psychotherapy

These therapies involve talking to someone. Your doctor may be able to recommend a trained professional. Professional counselling can be a great help if you are depressed. GP practices often have access to a counselling or psychotherapy service.

One form of psychotherapy, is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). It has been shown to work as well as antidepressants. CBT involves looking at how you think about things, confronting negative thoughts and focussing your attention on positive thoughts and actions.

### Medication

Medications to treat PND are generally **not** addictive. They work for many people. Your doctor will advise which is best for you. They will look at things such as if you are breast feeding.

### Hospital-based care

You may have thoughts about harming yourself or ending your life, if this is the case you would need more specialised help. Your GP, midwife or health visitor will refer you to a psychiatrist if this is needed. Although you may get psychiatric treatment to help you recover, this must be part of a care plan with support and practical help involving partners, family and friends. Admission into hospital is rare unless you have severe depression. You will need a lot of support around you during your hospital stay and when you go home. Voluntary support, for example Home-start can sometimes be arranged for you.

### Self help

There are a few ways you can help yourself get better:

- **Rest and relax each day** - Use relaxation techniques that you may have been taught when preparing to give birth. Or call leisure centres for postnatal exercise groups or yoga (crèche facilities may be available).
- **Do gentle exercise** - Just getting out of the house and going for a walk can help you feel better.
- **Take life one day at a time** - Try to see the positive in things. Not everything in your life is always negative, even if it feels like it at the moment.
- **Let yourself and your partner be intimate** - A kiss and a cuddle can be a source of great comfort and reassurance, even if you do not feel like having sex.
- **Eat a balanced diet** - Mothers are often so busy looking after their babies, you can forget

about yourself. You may be keen to lose the weight gained in pregnancy and start to diet soon after the baby is born. Remember you need time to recover. A good diet and exercise will help you regain your health and vitality. A lot of women have low iron levels (anaemia) in late pregnancy and after the birth. This can leave you feeling tired or exhausted. We may offer you a blood test after the birth to check your iron levels. If this is low, we will prescribe you iron tablets. We will also give you advice about diet to help bring your iron levels back to normal.

- **Be open about your feelings and worries** - This will help others understand what you need. Talk to your midwife, health visitor or GP - no question is ever too small or too silly. You can also join a postnatal group. This is a good way of meeting with other parents, exchanging information, relaxing and building up confidence. You can also find some PND support groups in some areas. These can be very helpful in sharing feelings with other parents about coping with PND.

## How your partner and your family can help you

Living with a depression can be very difficult and frustrating. Your family and partner may find it useful to think of the baby's arrival as a crisis that will pass.

**Your family can give you support, encouragement and hope. They can help by being patient and understanding. Their help in a time of crisis is really important.**

Most importantly, they need to be prepared to seek help, both for you and themselves if they feel you need it.

## How can my partner and family help support me?

- **Be patient.** Remember depression is an illness
- **Listen to your true feelings.** Your fears and feelings need to be treated seriously.
- **Be sympathetic.** It will be difficult to admit these feelings. To say them out loud will have taken a great deal of courage.
- **Offering help** with practical childcare arrangements. Doing the cleaning/washing/ironing whilst you spend some time relaxing and getting to know your baby.
- **Find out more** about depression and PND.

Partners can be the most important person to help recovery. Whilst this may seem a good thing, it may also feel like a burden at times. Do please ask for help from your health professionals. As well as the suggestions above, the following will be of help for your partner so ask them to read this section:

- **Reassure your partner often** that the illness is temporary and they will get well.
- **Reassure them of your love and support.**
- **Make sure you all get enough food and rest.**
- **Encourage each other to be active.** Going for a short walk together will help you to feel better too.

- **Draw their attention to any small improvements** you notice in their well-being. Praising them will reinforce the behaviour that has led to that improvement. It can give them hope and courage to carry on.
- **Make time for yourselves** as a couple without your children.
- **Look after yourself.** Get help if you need it - do not keep it to yourselves.

Depression after the birth of a baby threatens the parent's health, relationship, friendships and career, as well as the baby's and children's welfare.

Dealing with it on a day-to-day basis can be a huge challenge for family and friends. With support and patience, together you can help in the recovery.

## Postnatal post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

PTSD symptoms may appear soon after the birth or may be delayed for some months. The reasons women may get this are unclear. Often women describe feeling 'out of control' and very afraid during the birth. Emergency births or being separated from their baby, and past history of trauma in childhood or domestic abuse/violence are also linked with PTSD.

### How does it affect you?

This problem is usually noticed when women say they are having difficulty with:

- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Panic attacks
- Sleeping problems
- Irritability and anger
- Irrational behaviour
- Difficulty bonding

You need to talk to someone about how you are feeling. Your midwife, GP or Health Visitor will be able to advise you where to get help.

## Puerperal psychosis

This is a rare health problem. It affects about 1 in 500 new mothers. Women with a family history of mental illness or who have had puerperal psychosis in earlier pregnancies are a higher risk.

Symptoms include:

- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that do not exist).
- Delusions (incredible beliefs such as thinking you must save the world).
- Mania (extremely energetic and bizarre activity like washing clothes in the middle of the night).

The symptoms can be severe. They can sometimes be very frightening for you, your partner and your family. In fact your partner may be the first to know that you are unwell.

It is important that your partner or someone close to you knows after the birth.

It will be very obvious that medical help is needed. You should get help right away from your GP or from Emergency Services.

Seeking help quickly will make sure that you recovery quickly. Women with this illness are often treated in hospital with specialists.

## Support and advice

### Pregnancy, birth and postnatal support and advice

#### Birth Reflections

A listening and information service with a chance to talk, in private, with a midwife about issues around labour and birth.

0116 258 4857 (leave message and a midwife will call you back)

#### Birth Trauma Association

Support for women who have had a traumatic birth experience

[www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk](http://www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk)

#### Bridges

Supporting young children, parents and families, including a directory of services

0116 222 1161 <https://www.bridgeleicester.org/>

#### National Childbirth Trust (NCT)

Run by local parents, the Leicester branch offers support, information and friendship to new parents and parents-to-be.

0300 33 00 771 (8am to 10pm) [www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk)

### Breastfeeding support and advice

**National Breastfeeding Helpline:** 0300 100 0212

#### La Leche League

Information and support for breastfeeding mothers

0116 288 0041 [www.laleche.org.uk](http://www.laleche.org.uk)

#### Association of Breastfeeding Mothers

Fully trained volunteer breastfeeding counsellors taking calls in their own homes. All our volunteers have breastfed their own baby. They have also had a lot of training in breastfeeding matters.

0300 330 5453 (24hour helpline) [www.abm.me.uk](http://www.abm.me.uk)



**Breastfeeding Network:** [www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/)

0300 100 0212. They also have a helpline in other languages: [www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/contact-us/helplines/](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/contact-us/helplines/) including:

**Supporter line in Bengali/Sylheti** - 0300 456 2421

**Twins Trust** [twinstrust.org/](http://twinstrust.org/)

Support for parents of twins, triplets or more. 0800 138 0509 (10am to 1pm and 7pm to 10pm).

## Emotional support, advice and befriending

**Association for Postnatal Illness (APNI)**

Support to mothers with post-natal illness. 0207 386 0868 [www.apni.org](http://www.apni.org)

**Home-start** [www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk)

The Leicester office gives support and friendship for families

[homestarthorizons.org.uk/](http://homestarthorizons.org.uk/)

Phone: 0116 279 5062

**Vita minds**-Talking therapies. [www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk/](http://www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk/)

**PNI UK** - Perinatal Illness [www.pni-uk.com](http://www.pni-uk.com)

**Mum's mind**- support by text: 07507 330 026 between 9am and 4pm weekdays

**The Samaritans** - Confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

[www.samaritans.org/](http://www.samaritans.org/) Call 116 123 any time day or night

**The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)**

01455 883300 [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

## Relationship support and advice

**Relate** - Counselling services for every type of relationship 0116 254 3011

**Domestic Violence Helpline** - Leicester : 0808 8020 028 or National : 0808 2000 247

**Victim Support Line** - Support for victims of sexual crimes, racial harassment and domestic violence 0800 953 9595 9am to 6pm (Mon to Sat) <https://victimfirst.org/>

## Parenting support and advice

**Cry-sis** - Support for families with excessively crying, sleepless and demanding babies.

0800 448 0737 (9am - 10pm, 7 days a week) [www.cry-sis.org.uk](http://www.cry-sis.org.uk)

**Gingerbread** - Support for lone parents/families and women facing pregnancy on their own.

0808 802 0925 [www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)

## Family Lives: Confidential freephone helpline for anyone caring for children

0800 800 2222 Mon to Fri 9am to 9pm Sat and Sun 10am to 3pm

**East Midlands Money Advice (EMMA)** - 0116 242 1120 (Mon to Fri 9am to 5pm)

## Asian and Black Women's Centres

Belgrave Baheno : 0116 266 7673

Jain Centre : jainbhagini.leicester@gmail.com

Ajanin Women's Centre : 0116 251 4747

Ban Raksha project : 0116 246 4590

Shama Women's Centre [shamawomenscentre.co.uk/](http://shamawomenscentre.co.uk/) 0116 251 4747

## Other useful websites

[healthforunder5s.co.uk/](http://healthforunder5s.co.uk/)

Baby Buddy app - Visit [www.bestbeginnings.org.uk](http://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk) #babybuddyapp

This information on 'Emotional wellbeing' information was originally produced by the Emotional Transition to Parenthood Sub-Group of the Maternity Service Liaison Committee for Leicester and Leicestershire.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।  
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