

# Pregnancy & Postnatal Mental Wellbeing

## Patient Information

Health Visiting Service

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## Introduction

Pregnancy and the postnatal period are often considered one of the happiest times in a woman's life.

However, the physical and hormonal changes during your pregnancy and postnatal period (after birth and up to the first year) can make it an emotional time.

This is normal when you are going through a major life change such as becoming a parent.

Mental wellbeing is about being able to cope with problems, feeling good and functioning well, and is very important when you are expecting a baby and becoming a new parent.

During pregnancy, your baby is exposed to everything you experience - the sounds in the environment, the air you breathe, the food you eat and the emotions you feel.

When a pregnant woman or a new mum feels happy and calm, it allows the baby to develop in a happy, calm environment.

However, being depressed and/or anxious can increase certain hormones in the body which may affect the baby's developing body and brain. Therefore, it is important to seek support aimed at reducing your anxiety/depression. This in turn will improve both your own and your baby's health.

## What causes this depression and anxiety?

Popular images of motherhood suggest that mothers should be radiant and energetic, living in perfect homes with supportive partners. But life is not always like that!

The changes that being pregnant and having a baby can bring can increase everyday pressures in your life.

Financial worries, relationship difficulties, bereavement, or lack of someone you feel you can talk to may add to the feelings of depression and/or anxiety.

Remember, you are not alone, even though you may feel that you are the only person not coping.

## Baby Blues

The baby blues is a very common condition affecting about three out of four new mothers.

During the first week after your baby is born, you may feel more emotionally sensitive and may have mood swings. One minute you can be laughing and the next crying. This is considered to be a normal reaction to the joys and responsibilities of new parenthood.

It may be associated with hormone changes, exhaustion and relief that the birth is over. With rest and support, this condition will get better on its own.

## Depression and Anxiety

Depression and anxiety are the most common health problems during pregnancy, with around 12% of women experiencing depression and 13% experiencing anxiety at some point; many women will experience both.

Depression and anxiety also affect 15-20% of women in the first year after childbirth.

You may experience one or more of the following:

- Crying spells or extreme sadness - not always for a reason
- Feelings of worthlessness, guilt or hopelessness
- Restlessness, lack of control or lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Withdrawing from partner, family or friends
- Losing motivation and/or enjoyment of things
- Changes in sleep or appetite e.g., sleeping or eating too little or too much.
- Being anxious, irritable or worrying excessively. This could include:
  - Irrational fears about your baby
  - Feeling you cannot cope with your baby
  - Feeling that only you can care for your baby.

If you experience any of these for longer than **two weeks**, or if you feel overwhelmed by these or other worrying issues, regardless of the time frame, please visit your GP or contact your midwife or health visitor.

## What is Puerperal Psychosis?

The term 'psychosis' refers to a state of mind in which the woman loses contact with reality.

It is a serious mental illness that affects 1-2 in 1000 new mothers. The condition is very rare. It usually occurs within the first six weeks of giving birth, often within the first few days.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of puerperal psychosis may be restlessness, confusion, and inability to sleep.

Some women suffer delusions which are false beliefs about their situation, for example, that someone is trying to harm them or their baby.

Some women also experience hallucinations, hearing or seeing things that others around them cannot.

Due to the seriousness of this illness, these symptoms become quickly apparent and need early treatment from a health professional. Most women do recover.

Contact details for mental health professionals can be found on page 6, or you may wish to attend your nearest Accident and Emergency department.

## Tips

Tips to help you before and after the baby's birth, which may help to prevent anxiety and depression:

- Prepare not just for the birth, but parenthood too, by attending antenatal transition to parenthood classes
- Talk to your partner, family and friends, midwife, or health visitor; no question is too small or too trivial
- Accept that your needs are important and give yourself 'time out' each day - a soak in the bath or a walk in the park
- Eat properly - small amounts that need little or no cooking; do not try to crash diet
- Avoid alcohol: remember, alcohol is a depressant and is dangerous to the developing baby
- Get regular exercise; this produces endorphins (mood enhancers) that help combat pain, tiredness, and sleep disturbances
- Rest when possible - learn to 'cat nap'. If you cannot sleep, do not worry, rest instead
- Try to minimise your stress levels. Avoid major changes in your life such as moving to a new house unless absolutely necessary
- Try not to be 'super mum'. If help is offered, accept it and never be embarrassed to ask for help
- Do not worry if you do not feel like having sex. Talk to your partner - a kiss and a cuddle can help maintain your relationship
- Remember - the world is still out there. Access your local support and activity groups.
- Postnatal depression is worse at different times of the day for different people.
- Plan to do any necessary jobs at the time of the day you feel at your best.

- Take one day at a time and set yourself small achievable goals.
- Keep a 'feelings' diary. Gradually there will be more good days than bad.
- Accept that there will still be bad days even when you are on the road to recovery. The bad days become bad hours, then bad moments; the rest of the day is still there to enjoy.

## What about fathers?

Studies suggest that fathers can also experience depression after the birth of their child. It also suggests that between 5% and 10% of men experience depression during the first year after the birth of their child.

This can be due to:

- Increased responsibility
- The expense of having children and the change in lifestyle that it brings
- The altered relationship with your partner
- Lack of sleep and the increased workload at home.

If your partner is depressed, this may make their role as a parent more stressful, which in turn can add to the risk of you experiencing depression.

## Advice for family and friends

Pregnancy and the new baby's arrival may be a demanding time for all of the family, but particularly the mother.

If you think someone you care about could be depressed:

- Show them that you care by offering them love and support
- Listen to what they are saying and do not be dismissive
- Accept that they cannot carry on as before
- Do give time and try to be patient - it is your most precious gift
- Nurture their confidence - they may not believe in themselves right now
- Encourage them to take time out
- Offer help with practical childcare arrangements
- Encourage them to seek and continue with professional support.

Supporting someone with depression can leave you exhausted too; make sure that you take care of yourself and share the load.

## If you think you are depressed

- Accept that you cannot carry on as normal.
- Talk to your family and friends; their support is very important.
- Seek professional help from your midwife, health visitor or GP. They will be able to give you information, advice, and treatment.

Your midwife and health visitor offer screening for antenatal and postnatal anxiety and depression; this is carried out before and after your baby's birth.

The screening includes some simple questions which will help you to make sense of how you are feeling.

Your health visitor will support you in understanding your baby.

If you require further support, your health visitor, will offer this in the form of 'listening' visits.

Your health visitor will discuss what services are available if you need more support.

## Useful Contacts

Your Midwife, Health Visitor or GP.



For Health Visitor contact details and other information please scan

### **Samaritans**

Telephone: 116 123 free from any phone or 0330 094 5717 local call charges apply  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### **The National Childbirth Trust (NCT)**

Telephone: 0300 330 0700  
[www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk)

### **CRY-SIS** - a helpline for parents of babies who persistently cry

Telephone: 0845 122 8669 (helpline 9am to 10pm)

### **Mental Health Assessment Team:**

Wigan 01942 636395

### **Think Wellbeing Wigan**

Telephone: 01942 264051

### **Family Lives**

Telephone: 0808 800 2222

**Building Attachments and Bonds Support Service (BABS)**

Telephone 01942 764448

[www.gmmh.nhs.uk/building-attachment-and-bonds-support](http://www.gmmh.nhs.uk/building-attachment-and-bonds-support)

**Startwell Family Centres** - see your local council website

**Wigan Family Welfare**

Telephone: 01942 876888

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk/relax](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/relax)

[www.dadsmatteruk.org](http://www.dadsmatteruk.org)

[www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com)

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

[www.live-lifewell.net](http://www.live-lifewell.net)

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## Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

## Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

The Patient Relations/PALS Manager  
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary  
Wigan Lane  
Wigan WN1 2NN

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## Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



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## How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use and store the information we hold about you, please take a look at our “how we use your information” leaflet which can be found on the Trust website: <https://www.wwl.nhs.uk>

This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille and other languages upon request. For more information please ask in the department/ward.

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**Call 111 first when it's less urgent than 999.**



Phone: 0808 802 1212  
Text: 81212  
[www.veteransgateway.org.uk](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk)

