

Post-natal depression. What is it and what can you do to recover?

It is entirely normal to experience a range of feelings after having a baby. At least half of all new mums experience the 'baby blues', usually within a few days of giving birth. This is often linked to changes in hormones and can leave people feeling very emotional, anxious or exhausted. You may also wonder if you will manage to cope with being a parent. This normally lasts only a few days.

If these feelings persist for longer or get more severe, it may be that you have developed post-natal depression. The symptoms are similar to any other type of depression: feeling low or tearful; being unable to enjoy things; losing motivation; experiencing changes in appetite or sleep (either too much or too little); having difficulty concentrating; feeling exhausted; small tasks feel like a huge effort; feeling guilty; feeling a failure as a parent; feeling helpless or hopeless and unable to cope. You may also feel very irritable or anxious. It is thought that about 1 in 10 mothers suffer from post-natal depression. This can happen to first time mothers as well as after a second or subsequent child - even if you coped well with your first baby.

There are many reasons why people develop post-natal depression. It can be triggered by the biological, hormonal changes or physical changes after the birth. It can also be caused by emotional reactions to becoming a mother. Motherhood is often portrayed as a wonderful experience, but the reality is often more difficult, and you may worry you are not the 'perfect' mother. Social changes, such as having to stop work, changes in your relationship with your partner or friends, and being more isolated, can also contribute.

The important thing is not to suffer alone. There are many things that can help you cope and recover:

- Talk to friends and family about your feelings. Ask for practical help so you can get some rest.
- Don't spend too much time alone. See friends and family and try to meet other parents.
- Exercise regularly and eat well. Even short walks can help.
- Get as much sleep as possible. For example, try napping when the baby is asleep or ask your partner to do night time feeds.
- Have some time to yourself to relax – even if you can only manage half an hour.
- Take things one step at a time.

Remember that help is available. Let your doctor or health visitor know how you feel. They can give further advice or may recommend talking therapies or medication. For further information and advice see:

<http://www.mind.org.uk/Information/Booklets/Understanding/Understanding+postnatal+depression.htm>

<http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/leaflets/Postnatal%20Depression.pdf>

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