



Chasing the Blues Away

Postnatal Depression Information Booklet



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Introduction

Child birth can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences in any woman's life. The creation of a new life is a very personal experience which brings enormous pride, pleasure and responsibility. The first few weeks pass in a flurry of visitors, well-wishers, helpers, and a general excitement about the new addition to your family.

While it is a very exciting time, new mums can and do feel tired, stressed and sometimes overwhelmed by their new circumstances; these feelings are natural and a period of adjustment is to be expected.

However, for some women these feelings may persist. The weeks and months following childbirth may be a time of extreme exhaustion due to lack of sleep. As the short-term support network quietly fades into the background, the new mum is left with the overwhelming realisation that they are now responsible for the health, happiness and well-being of an extremely vulnerable child. They may be unable to share their feelings, suffer alone and become confused about what is happening. If this is the case, it might be that the new mum has postnatal depression and help should be sought.

Postnatal Depression

Postnatal Depression is a reaction to a life event. Many generations of women have lived through this, with Postnatal Depression going unrecognised, but this does not have to be the case.

- Education and support during pregnancy and after childbirth can help.
 - Seeking proper support and diagnosis can also help.
- Such help can lessen the effect of postnatal depression on the whole family and assist in a speedy recovery.

The purpose of the booklet is to highlight this problem and to help mothers and their families seek the necessary assistance. It should also help to assure all concerned that full recovery is possible.



Personal Accounts

The following stories show the emotional roller-coaster ride, which some mothers go through after giving birth. With help and early intervention all these mums have recovered, regained their confidence and have gone on to enjoy motherhood.



Mary's Story (24 year old nurse)

"I was the mother of a beautiful baby girl, had a normal delivery and everything went well. It was my first baby and the first grandchild, so as soon as she was born I had a lot of visitors.

I should have felt wonderful but instead on the third day I felt miserable, tearful, upset and unable to sleep. My baby was jaundiced and not feeding properly. Everybody was telling me what to do but I felt useless, unable to cope and had no appetite. I felt disappointed in myself and did not want my family and friends to know what a failure I thought I was. I needed someone to talk to for advice and help, but I did not have the courage to ask."

Sally's Story (19 year old teenager)

"I got pregnant and I was not ready. Nine months later, following a very hard birth, my baby arrived and I did not know what to do. I felt totally miserable, but I did not want anybody to know. After coming home I fell into a routine. The baby was fed and clean, but somewhere in this I was lost. I wanted somebody to tell me what was wrong with me but at the same time how could I tell anybody that I couldn't cope. Why did I not want this baby? Why couldn't I have my old life back? I continued to feel this way for months. My partner knew that something was wrong, but didn't know what to do and so I felt totally alone."

John's Story (35 year old husband)

"We waited a long time for our baby so she was very precious to us. I could not wait for them to come home so that we could be one big happy family. For a while, after the birth, my wife was in great form, though very tired. Parents and friends were a great help and everything seemed to be great.

As time passed things seemed to change. The baby was not sleeping well and keeping us up all night. This wore us down. My wife gradually became very down in herself and got upset over silly little things. Before the birth she was full of life and always laughing. I did not know what was happening. I dreaded coming home every evening to find her sitting at the table crying.

I tried to take time off work to help but as I was self-employed I did not get paid if I did not work. It was becoming very difficult to cope, trying to make ends meet and worrying about my wife and new baby. I wondered what was happening to us. It was not something men talked about with their pals. I did not know who or where to turn for help. How could I get my wife to accept help when she would not even talk to me?"

"We used to be able to talk about anything, but not now. She doesn't want to know.... why won't she let me help?"
(Partner)



Angie's Story (30 year old homemaker)

"The days after the birth were a disaster, visitors calling, telephone ringing and neighbours popping in to welcome the new arrival. Friends were very good at offering to help but I was too proud to let anyone help me. I was now a mother and responsible for another life. I told myself I should be able to cope, however I still worried, rushed around cleaning, washing and fretting over my baby. With the result that as the days went by instead of feeling better I was feeling worse. I could not rest even when my baby was sleeping, nor could I relax as my mind could not rest. I was scared, not sleeping and felt alone but most of all I felt a failure. I could not wait for Jim to get home from work but when he did I often snapped his head off and got myself worked up over the slightest thing. What was happening to me? Was I going mad? I was afraid to ask if all mothers go through this panic."

- During pregnancy and following the birth women can feel a wide range of emotions, from joy to sadness, from worry to feeling unable to cope.
- Sometimes, in spite of help and support, women still may feel bewildered and scared, especially in the early weeks. The important thing to remember is that these feelings are very common and usually last for a short period.
- **New mothers should not blame themselves for their feelings, which are common and easily treatable.**



Normal Feelings After Childbirth

Pinks

For the first three days after giving birth, although tired, most women can feel 'on top of the world', that is, they feel happy, excited and thrilled with themselves and their new baby.

However, a small number of women may feel down after the birth and may not bond with their baby. This can be very upsetting, but normally these feelings pass in a couple of days.

Baby Blues

Around the third or fourth day after giving birth, most women go through what is known as the 'baby blues'. This is quite normal and very common and may last up to a week.



How you may be feeling;

- Crying for no reason
- Tired and weary
- Feeling useless
- Anxious (stressed out)
- Unable to sleep
- Cross and cranky
- Not eating properly

What can you do to help yourself?

- Rest, rest and more rest, take naps when you can and as often as you can.
- Do not be too hard on yourself. You do not have to be superwoman. Accept help around the house from family and friends.
- Eat a healthy diet, a little and often if your appetite is poor. Take plenty of drinks especially if breastfeeding.
- Talk about your feelings to your partner and friends and allow yourself to have a good cry if you feel upset.
- Treat yourself and try to organise time for yourself and your partner.

What partners/family/friends can do to help?

- Be aware that most new mothers go through the 'baby blues'. Be patient and willing to help with the baby and the housework.
- Give the new mother time out to rest and relax.

If after a couple of weeks things have not improved, please do not be afraid to talk to your Public Health Nurse or General Practitioner. They are there to help you.



Postnatal Depression

“Why does a woman go through all of this (pregnancy and childbirth) and end up feeling this way?”

What is it?

Postnatal depression is a term used to cover feelings of depression after having a baby. At first many women are tired, feel unsure and are not able to cope when they come home from hospital. This normally passes within a couple of weeks. However, for mothers with postnatal depression, things do not improve.

What causes it?

A number of factors may contribute to postnatal depression. These include:

- Psychological and social factors - the demands, obligations and responsibilities of being a mother. A new mother may fear that she is inadequate and unable to live up to her own and/or other people's expectations.
- Family factors - the relationship a mother has with the child's father, and the support she receives from other people.
- Biological factors - hormonal changes that occur following childbirth.



Mothers may not know what is wrong with them and do not want anybody else to know their feeling about themselves and their baby. This makes it difficult to look for help, but, by doing so, the mother can get the support and help she needs to make a speedy recovery.

The main points to look for are:

- A lack of interest in yourself or the baby.
- Unable to cope, finding everything is an effort.
- Feeling that you are a bad mother, guilty and ashamed.
- Fear of being left alone with your baby.
- Feeling angry, rejected, confused and unable to concentrate.
- Feelings of panic, anxiety, dizziness, fast heart beat, sick in your stomach and sweating.
- Feeling exhausted yet unable to sleep properly (finding it hard to get to sleep and/or waking up very early in the morning).
- No interest in food or over eating.
- No interest in sexual relations.
- Feelings of hopelessness.



What can you do to help yourself?

- Accept there is a problem and you need help.
- Talk to your partner, family or friends. They will want to help. We all expect to be able to cope and when we cannot, we feel guilty. But remember, it is not your fault and you can be helped.
- Ask for advice and support from your Public Health Nurse, Practitioner or Community Nurse.
- Postnatal depression does not last forever and the sooner it is recognised the sooner you will get better.
- Contact the Postnatal Depression Support Group (see back of this leaflet for contact details) where you can meet other mothers going through similar experiences.

What partners, family and friends can do to help?

- Encourage the new mother to talk about how she feels.
- Ask family and friends to help around the house.
- Be patient and supportive.
- Try to ensure the new mother gets enough food and rest.
- Organise babysitting so that you can have time together as a couple.
- Partners, be aware that the new mother may not be in the mood for sexual relations but does need love and affection.
- Reassure the new mother that she will recover.
- Ensure that the new mother attends her postnatal appointments.
- Be prepared to seek help for the new mother and yourself if necessary through the Public Health Nurse, General Practitioner or Community Nurse.
- Allow the new mother and baby time to bond and get to know each other without feeling under stress.
- In extreme cases hospital care may be needed.



"I want to reach out to her as I've been there too, but I remember the shame so I can't."
(Mother-in-law)

"I can't talk to her, she's so distant and grumpy, sometimes its like walking on eggshells". (Brother)

Helpful Suggestions

- Accept there is a problem and you need help.
- Take life one day at a time. Try to find the positive in things. Not everything in your life is always negative, even if it feels like it at the moment. It will be difficult at the start but do try. If you don't look for the positive things in your life you won't see them.
- Be open about your feelings and worries to people you can trust and will understand. It is vital to have someone to talk to.
- Involve your partner as much as possible.
- Really try to get some exercise everyday; even if it is only a short walk around the block, fresh air will really help.
- Eat a balanced diet; little and often this will give you energy.
- Make a list of things that you enjoy doing and make you feel good. On the bad days look at the list and encourage yourself to do at least one of them.
- We all have certain times during the day when we feel better. Pick this time to make a short to do list for the next day; this is to include a treat for yourself.
- Find time to have FUN. Accept genuine offers of help, go out with your partner or a friend even if only for 1 hour, you will feel the benefit the next day.
- Try not to be SUPERWOMAN. Caring for a baby 24 hours a day is very exhausting. You are allowed to drop your standards for a while.
- Avoid situations that could be potentially stressful. If it isn't going to make you feel better then don't do it.

- Don't be too hard on yourself or your partner. Blaming yourself or others is not helpful for anyone, least of all you. Accept that life is tough at this time but it will get better.
- Take every opportunity to rest. Take naps when you can and as often as you can. Let your partner / family share in caring for your baby. It is really important to get sleep especially if you have had a bad day.
- Do talk to your GP and Public Health Nurse, they are there to help.
- It can be helpful to write down how you're feeling. It gets it off your chest and you can always burn it afterwards.
- If things are really bad in the middle of the night and you have nobody to talk to, ring the Samaritans 1850609090.

Some mothers have difficult births. Some are alone and have no support. Before the mother leaves the maternity hospital it is important for her to talk to the Midwife or Liaison Public Health Nurse.

Conclusion

- Try not to be so anxious that you lose your good feelings about your baby.
- Please, if you are able, write down the good moments, and share them with your partner, family or friends. It will help you see that positives do exist, no matter how small.
- Talk to other mothers. They may have had the same problems and could help.

We all expect to feel a gush of love for our new baby. This may not happen straight away for every mother. Skills will come with time and experience. Do not be afraid to look for help.

Antenatal Depression

*"What can I do? I've babysat, helped with housework, but it's not enough."
(Friend)*

Depression during pregnancy is more common than we think.

We've all heard of Postnatal Depression, but few people are aware that women can become depressed during pregnancy too. Pregnancy is a time when the world expects you to be a cheery person - blooming with good health and optimism (despite morning sickness and other problems).

How do I know if I have it?

Most women have mood swings during pregnancy and shout or cry. This is perfectly normal! However, if you are constantly feeling down, angry or anxious, this may be more than a temporary blip and might need more careful attention. If you feel that you are slipping into depression, get help fast. Your General Practitioner is the first point of call.

Puerperal Psychosis

The most severe form of psychiatric illness after childbirth is called Puerperal Psychosis. It is a rare event that affects one in 500 women. The majority of women with Puerperal Psychosis develop symptoms within the first two weeks after childbirth. The earliest signs are restlessness, irritability, and insomnia and mild confusion. Urgent medical intervention is needed as Puerperal Psychosis is an emergency that can have serious health consequences for both mother and baby.



After Discharge from Hospital

General Practitioner Services

Every new mother is entitled to:

- One postnatal General Practitioner visit at 2 weeks for the mother.
- One postnatal General Practitioner visit at 6 weeks for both the mother and baby.

Community Public Health Nursing Service

Public Health Nurses are also midwives with special training in community nursing and provide the following services:

- When you leave hospital with your baby they will visit you in your home.
- Advice for both you and your baby.
- Ongoing support for the mother, baby and family especially in the first weeks after birth.
- Regular checks on the development and growth of the baby.

If you have any problems e.g. coping, feeding, sleeping or any other worries, the Public Health Nurse is there to provide help and understanding.

The Public Health Nursing Departments listed below will provide the name, address and telephone number of the Public Health Nurse in your local area.

Cork City, North Lee

Abbeycourt House,
George's Quay,
Cork.
021 4923863

Cork City, South Lee

Abbeycourt House,
George's Quay,
Cork.
021 4923836

North Cork

Gouldshill House,
Mallow,
Co. Cork.
022 30200

West Cork

Coolnagarrane,
Skibbereen,
Co. Cork.
028 21722

Kerry

Community Services Centre
Grounds of Kerry General
Hospital,
Tralee,
Co. Kerry.
Tel. 066 7121566



Other Useful Contacts

Aware

National freephone

1890 303302

Dublin 01 6617211

Tralee 066 7132909

Depression
Support Group.

Postnatal Distress Support Group

Cork 021 4923162

Provides information and
offers support for women
suffering from postnatal
depression.
www.pnd.ie

Cuidiú

National 01 8724501

Cork 021 4883960

Women's Support Group,
which provides help in
relation to women's health.
"Bumps and Babies" group,
breastfeeding information,
and antenatal sessions.

Samaritans

CallSave 1850 609090

Dublin 01 8727700

Listening service for people
who are lonely, depressed or
suicidal.

Homestart

Cork 021 4506123

Homestart offer support,
friendship and practical help
to young families under
stress, in their own homes.

Tuas Nua

Cork 021 4270187

Contact Y.M.C.A.,
11/12 Marlboro Street, Cork.
Support group for young
mothers. Services include
ante- and postnatal classes,
parenting courses, creche
facilities and home visits.

La Leche League

Cork 021 4552357

087 9791289

Telephone and information
service, group support for
breastfeeding mothers.
www.lalecheleague.org

Parentline

Dublin 01 8733500

National 1890 927277

Offer support help line for
parents.



HSE South,
Wilton Road,
Cork.
021 4923733

Postnatal Depression Support Group
Support Line: 021 4923162
email: support@pnd.ie
www.pnd.ie



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive