

### Treating your Anxiety and Depression

It is vital to seek support and treatment for the way you are feeling as soon as possible:

**Talking about how you have been feeling.** Talking with a trusted person about your feelings is important.

**Create a support network.** Connect with understanding friends, family/whānau and professionals. Avoid people who are critical or unsympathetic.

**Take it easy.** You might think it is important to clean the house but it is also important to make time for yourself - read a book, watch a movie or go for a walk. Looking after yourself is essential so you can care for your family.

**Diet and exercise.** Do your best to eat healthy food to give you energy to care for others. Fresh air, sunshine and gentle exercise also do wonders for stress levels and help you connect with others.

**Consider therapy or counselling.** If you have tried to sort things out on your own but nothing seems to work, seeing a therapist or a counsellor may help. You might benefit from antidepressants - some are safe to use when breastfeeding.

**If you need to seek help quickly.** If you are suicidal or feeling disoriented and unable to handle daily life, or are having panic attacks, contact your doctor or midwife immediately. **Dial 111 if you need urgent help or call 1737 for the Crisis Counsellor line.**

**You are doing the right thing.** You and your family/whānau should be reassured that seeing a therapist or psychiatrist is not a sign of weakness. It's a sign that you are taking important steps to keep yourself and your baby safe and healthy.

**Contact details for my support people:**

My midwife \_\_\_\_\_

My doctor \_\_\_\_\_

My Plunket nurse \_\_\_\_\_

My friend \_\_\_\_\_

My family/whanau \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

#### Contact Us

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Support is crucial, especially from people who are able to sit, listen, and make no judgments.

Once you start talking you will often be surprised at how many others have had similar experiences.

If you feel scared or overwhelmed it is important to know that help is available.

**Let down your mask and find support. You are worth it.**



## Behind the mask

### Postnatal anxiety and depression

Everyone's experience of parenthood is different. Just as there are physical changes, there are also common shifts in emotion after you give birth such as mood swings, anxiety and excitement.

Becoming a parent can be a wonderful experience, but it also brings many changes and challenges. Everybody feels down from time to time but a depressive illness is more than that. It is when several symptoms occur over the same time period. Postnatal depression (PND) is very similar to clinical depression occurring at any other time of life except that there is the added complication of a baby (or two!).

PND can range from mild to severe. At its most mild it is not dangerous and generally gets better with good emotional and practical support, sleep and time.

But, at its most serious it can be life threatening and can pose a risk to yourself, your baby and your family.

If you feel scared or overwhelmed it is important to know that help is available - many other mums and dads struggle with anxiety and depression when a new baby arrives.

You are not the only one that feels this way - and there is absolutely no need to suffer alone, so talk to your midwife, doctor or other health carer. No one expects you to be superwoman, so put down your mask and reach out for support.

**Hold on to hope**

“PND is generally considered to be a depression with a good outcome for recovery. In my experience this is true. Just hold on to hope. Many of us have experienced it.

Support is crucial, especially from people who are able to sit, listen, and make no judgments about your feelings and thoughts.”

Kathryn, a mum



### PADA

Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Aotearoa is the national organisation committed to eliminating the stigma around perinatal mental health in New Zealand.

We do this by championing awareness and facilitating best practice in perinatal mental health and wellbeing to ensure all families/whanau have access to appropriate information and support.

This resource is freely available to assist in raising awareness of anxiety and depression in new parents.

We gratefully acknowledge the Christine Taylor Foundation for Mental Health who donated funds to develop this resource.

[www.pada.nz](http://www.pada.nz)

### Recognising the signs

You might be suffering from postnatal anxiety or depression if you have any of these symptoms. Do any of these things affect you?

- Panic attacks
- Persistent worry, often focused on fears for you or your baby's health
- Developing obsessive or compulsive behaviours
- Experiencing abrupt mood swings
- Feeling constantly sad, low, or crying for no obvious reason
- Being nervous, 'on edge', or panicky
- Feeling constantly tired and lacking energy
- Having little or no interest in all the usual things that bring you joy
- Sleeping too much or not sleeping very well
- Feeling overwhelmed or numb
- Losing interest in sex and intimacy
- Withdrawing from your partner, friends and family/whānau
- Being easily annoyed or irritated, or feeling angry
- Finding it difficult to focus, concentrate or remember
- Engaging in more risk taking behaviour like using alcohol or drugs
- Having thoughts of death or suicide



### Learning to manage your anxiety and depression:

It can be very difficult to understand or talk about how you feel, but you must ask for support if you need it. The first and most important step to managing your anxiety and depression is to get an accurate assessment and to identify some of the things that contribute to the way you are feeling. Ask your health professional to do EPDS (Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale test). Sometimes, members of your family/whānau may recognise worrying signs even before you are aware you may need help.

While hormonal ups and downs affect all new mums, some feel the swings more intensely, but many other factors can contribute to you developing anxiety and depression.

Some mums may worry about their new role as a mother, have fears about looking after the new baby, and worry about how they will cope with all the day-to-day challenges of life. Many mums feel guilty about being unhappy because they think that everyone expects them to be content and blooming. But try not to worry, you WILL get better.

### You are more likely to develop anxiety and depression if:

- You have a family or personal history of depression
- You've suffered from infertility or have had a miscarriage
- You experience relationship difficulties
- You have a history of abuse
- You have faced stressful life events
- You don't have good social support
- You've had a difficult pregnancy or birth
- You are faced with financial difficulties

### I had no connection with my baby

"I dreaded the sound of my baby's cries thinking I had no idea what to do to help her. I had no connection emotionally with my baby.

I couldn't laugh, watch TV, or read. All the things that I knew used to make me laugh and feel good were gone. I felt nothing. The energy I normally got from looking at colour was gone. My joy at seeing a sunrise or sunset vanished."

Mere, a mum



### Partners with depression

Adjusting to being a parent can also be difficult for some partners. Common problems are:

- Uncertainty about about how to parent.
- Getting mixed messages from friends, family and the media.
- Not knowing how to help a partner through her depression.
- Finding parenthood does not match expectations.
- Having trouble bonding with their baby.
- Worrying that they are not earning enough.
- Feeling like a failure and being overwhelmed.
- Feeling trapped in a relationship, even if they are a keen parent.
- Not recognising signs of depression in their partner.

### A loving mum and a worthy person

"My recovery from postnatal depression was very much dependant on me feeling that I was both supported and could be in control as a loving mother to my child, but also a worthy person in my own right."

Jenny, a mum

**Remember**  
- you are not alone

THE NUMBER OF BIRTHS IN NEW ZEALAND IN 2018:

**58,020**

THE PERCENTAGE OF PREGNANT WOMEN WHO SUFFER FROM DEPRESSION DURING OR AFTER PREGNANCY:

**25%**

THE PERCENTAGE OF MEN WHO DEVELOP DEPRESSION AFTER THEIR CHILD IS BORN:

**10%**