



Adjusting to life as a mother can be difficult. In fact, for many women, having a baby is the most significant life-changing event they will ever experience. Adjusting to this major life change, as well as coping with the day-to-day demands of a new baby, can make some women more likely to experience depression at this time, particularly if they've experienced depression in the past.

HOW COMMON IS POSTNATAL DEPRESSION?

Postnatal depression (PND) affects 14 per cent of new mothers in Australia. As with depression, PND is common. On average, one in five people will experience depression at some point in their lives – one in four females and one in six males. Around one million Australian adults and 100,000 young people live with depression each year.

WHAT CAUSES POSTNATAL DEPRESSION?

Like depression which occurs at any other time, postnatal depression doesn't have one definite cause – but it's likely to result from a combination of factors including:

- a past history of depression and/or anxiety
- a stressful pregnancy
- depression during the current pregnancy
- a family history of mental disorders
- experiencing severe 'baby blues'
- a prolonged labour and/or delivery complications
- problems with the baby's health
- difficulty breastfeeding
- a lack of practical, financial and/or emotional support
- past history of abuse
- difficulties in close relationships
- being a single parent
- having an unsettled baby (e.g. difficulties with feeding and sleeping)
- having unrealistic expectations about motherhood
- moving house
- making work adjustments (e.g. stopping or re-starting work).

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE POSTNATAL DEPRESSION?

Postnatal depression has the same signs and symptoms as depression. Women with PND can experience a prolonged period of low mood, reduced interest in activities, tiredness and disturbance of sleep and appetite and negative thoughts and feelings. To find out about the general symptoms of depression, go to the series of depression checklists at www.beyondblue.org.au.

The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (see below) is a set of questions designed to see if a new mother may have depression. The answers will not provide a diagnosis – for that you need to see a doctor or other health professional. The answers will tell you however, if you or someone you know, has symptoms that are common in women with PND.

If you have concerns that you or someone you know has PND, please consult a doctor.

To complete this set of questions, mothers should circle the number next to the response which comes closest to how they have felt IN THE PAST SEVEN DAYS.

1 *I have been able to laugh and see the funny side of things.*

- 0 As much as I always could
- 1 Not quite so much now
- 2 Definitely not so much now
- 3 Not at all

2 *I have looked forward with enjoyment to things.*

- 0 As much as I ever did
- 1 Rather less than I used to
- 2 Definitely less than I used to
- 3 Hardly at all

3 *I have blamed myself unnecessarily when things went wrong.*

- 3 Yes, most of the time
- 2 Yes, some of the time

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1 Not very often

0 No, never

4 *I have been anxious or worried for no good reason.*

0 No, not at all

1 Hardly ever

2 Yes, sometimes

3 Yes, very often

5 *I have felt scared or panicky for no very good reason.*

3 Yes, quite a lot

2 Yes, sometimes

1 No, not much

0 No, not at all

6 *Things have been getting on top of me.*

3 Yes, most of the time I haven't been able to cope at all

2 Yes, sometimes I haven't been coping as well as usual

1 No, most of the time I have coped quite well

0 No, I have been coping as well as ever

7 *I have been so unhappy that I have had difficulty sleeping.*

3 Yes, most of the time

2 Yes, sometimes

1 Not very often

0 No, not at all

8 *I have felt sad or miserable.*

3 Yes, most of the time

2 Yes, quite often

1 Not very often

0 No, not at all

9 *I have been so unhappy that I have been crying.*

3 Yes, most of the time

2 Yes, quite often

1 Only occasionally

0 No, never

10 *The thought of harming myself has occurred to me.*

3 Yes, quite often

2 Sometimes

1 Hardly ever

0 Never

The total score is calculated by adding together the numbers you circled for each of the 10 items. The higher the score, the more likely it is that the person completing the questionnaire is distressed and may be depressed.

Scores provide only a rough guide as to whether a woman has postnatal depression. For a full diagnosis, it is important to see a doctor.

HOW IS POSTNATAL DEPRESSION TREATED?

There is a range of effective treatments for managing PND.

Psychological treatment

Psychological treatment, which is often referred to as 'talking therapy' has generally been found to be the most effective way of treating postnatal depression. Psychological treatment can help by:

- changing negative thoughts and feelings
- encouraging involvement in activities
- speeding recovery
- preventing depression from getting serious again.

Medication

Medication can play an important role in helping people with depression manage from day to day. Some people may worry about how antidepressants will affect a baby who is breastfed. However, remaining on medication can be important in order to avoid significant depression which can have a negative impact for both mother and baby.

If the mother is breastfeeding, specific types of medications are preferred. While a number of factors will influence the choice of antidepressant, tricyclics – Sertraline, Citalopram and Fluvoxamine – have been found to be least likely to cause any harm to infants.

The decision to take medication is up to the individual and should be made in consultation with a doctor, after considering the risks and benefits to both the mother and infant. For more details visit www.beyondblue.org.au or call the *beyondblue* info line on 1300 22 4636 (local call).

(Further reading: Buist, A. 'Guidelines for the Use of SSRI's in pregnant Women', *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Summer 2005, pp.18-20).



HOW TO HELP YOURSELF IF YOU HAVE POSTNATAL DEPRESSION

- Seek help and treatment from a doctor or other qualified health professional.
- Seek friendships with other women, including other mums who have postnatal depression.
- Organise childcare or ask friends or family to look after the child/ren occasionally to allow you to have time to yourself.
- Make sure you take time to do the things you enjoy like reading a book, listening to music or having a bath.
- Spend some time with your partner to help nurture the relationship.
- Develop a support system of friends, family and professionals and accept help.
- Restrict visitors when feeling unwell, overwhelmed or tired.
- Take things one step at a time.
- Don't bottle up feelings – discuss them with friends, family and your partner.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Practise deep breathing and muscle relaxation techniques.
- Try to establish good sleeping patterns.
- Learn about postnatal depression.
- Call a postnatal depression support service or mental health crisis line if things are getting tough and other help is not available.

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WITH POSTNATAL DEPRESSION

- Remember that postnatal depression is treatable.
- Encourage the woman to see a health professional. Offer to go along to the session with her.
- Learn about postnatal depression.
- Spend time listening, without feeling the need to offer solutions.
- Offer to spend time looking after the baby or older children or discuss other childcare options so the mum can have time to herself.
- Offer to help with housework like cooking and cleaning.
- Let the woman know how well she is doing when she makes small gains.
- Encourage the woman to use some self-help strategies.

- Look after yourself. Seek support for your own needs by joining a support group, keeping in touch with your family doctor and taking time out. By keeping yourself physically and mentally healthy, you will be better equipped to support the person with the illness.
- Expect that a person with postnatal depression can be moody, irritable, volatile, teary and withdrawn. Try not to take what they say as a personal attack.
- Contact a doctor or hospital, if the woman becomes a threat to herself or others.

WHERE TO GET HELP

- **A doctor** who is a General Practitioner (GP) is a good first step. In some cases, the person may be referred to a mental health specialist like a psychiatrist or psychologist. For a list of GPs with expertise in treating depression and related disorders visit the *beyondblue* website www.beyondblue.org.au and click on [Find a Doctor](#) or call the *beyondblue* info line on 1300 22 4636 (local call).
- **Psychiatrists** are doctors who specialise in mental health. They can make medical and psychological assessments, conduct medical tests and prescribe medication. Some psychiatrists use psychological treatments.
- **Psychologists, Social Workers and Occupational Therapists** specialise in providing non-medical (psychological) treatment for depression and related disorders. A rebate can now be claimed through Medicare for psychological treatments when your GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician refers you to a registered psychologist, social worker or occupational therapist. This rebate can be claimed for part of the cost for up to 12 individual (18 in exceptional circumstances) and 12 group sessions in a calendar year. For more details ask your referring medical practitioner. For a list of mental health professionals providing psychological treatment for which you can claim a Medicare rebate go to:
 - Clinical Psychologists: www.beyondblue.org.au under [Find a Psychologist](#)
 - Psychologists: www.psychology.org.au under [Find a Psychologist](#)
 - Social Workers: www.aasw.asn.au under [Find a Mental Health Worker](#)
 - Occupation Therapists: www.ausot.com.au under [Find a Mental Health OT](#)

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beyondblue: the national depression initiative

www.beyondblue.org.au

Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and where to get help.

beyondblue info line 1300 22 4636

Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and referral only (local call).

www.ybblue.com.au

beyondblue's website for young people – information on depression and how to help a friend.

Suicide Helpline – Victoria

1300 651 251 or www.suicidehelpline.org.au

24 hour counselling, crisis intervention, information and referral (local call).

Mensline Australia

1300 789 978 or www.menslineaus.org.au

24 hour support for men with family and relationship problems especially around family breakdown or separation – this service provides anonymous telephone support, information and referral (local call).

Lifeline

13 11 14

24 hour counselling, information and referral (local call).

Lifeline's "Just Ask"

1300 13 11 14

Rural Mental Health Information Service.

Moodgym

www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

Online psychological therapy.

Climate.tv – interactive e-health

www.climate.tv

Developed by medical experts, this is a self-management system for people with depression and anxiety.

Black Dog Institute

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Information on depression (including during and after pregnancy) and bipolar disorder – specifically causes, treatments, symptoms, getting help and current research findings.

Post and Antenatal Depression Association Inc (PaNDa)

www.panda.org.au

Provides information for women and their families affected by antenatal and postnatal mood disorders about the causes and symptoms of these disorders, as well as types of treatments and support services available.

The North Queensland Postnatal Distress Support Group (NQPNDG)

www.nqpostnataldistress.com

Information on the causes of PND and recovery patterns of these disorders. There is also information about and contact details for the North Queensland Postnatal Distress Support Group and other related services in the area.

Posie

www.posie.org.au

Information on the causes, symptoms and effects of post and antenatal depression – and information about available services.

Good Beginnings

www.goodbeginnings.net.au

Information on parenting children and details of support services for new parents.

Tresillian

www.tresillian.net

Information on parenting children and details of support services for new parents.

Karitane

www.karitane.com.au

Information on parenting children, including a section on managing postnatal depression, and details of support services for new parents.

CRUfAD

www.crufad.org

Information about depression, anxiety and its management.

Public Health Centres

Community public health centres also provide help and advice on child and maternal health issues. See your local telephone directory or health service.

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