

A RESOURCE FOR

New Mums

'Baby Blues' vs Postnatal Anxiety and Depression

Having a new baby can be both an exciting and challenging time for parents.

Between sleepless nights, changes in hormones, and disruptions to the family dynamic, it is no wonder many people struggle. Up to 80% of mums will experience some form of 'baby blues' following childbirth. This usually includes mood swings, tearfulness, irritability, and feeling overwhelmed. For some people these symptoms settle down after a couple of weeks without needing treatment.

More than
1 in 7

mums will experience anxiety or depression within the year after birth, with many experiencing both.

People who have a history of anxiety and depression, as well as people who have never experienced them can be affected.

The terms postnatal anxiety and depression get used a lot, however many people are unsure of what it means. Below is a checklist of common symptoms.

|  Emotional Changes |  Physical Changes |  Changes in Thinking |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Constantly feeling sad, low or flat <input type="checkbox"/> Abrupt mood swings <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling nervous, panicky, on edge <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, guilt, shame or inadequacy <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling isolated <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawing from friends and family <input type="checkbox"/> Becoming easily annoyed, irritated <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling angry and resentful <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling scared and alone, but also not wanting to be with others <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of leaving the house or being alone | <input type="checkbox"/> Crying unexpectedly and uncontrollably <input type="checkbox"/> Having panic attacks <input type="checkbox"/> Constantly feeling tired and lacking energy <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced motivation <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches, muscle tension <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties getting out of bed <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced interest and pleasure in hobbies and activities <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping too much, or not sleeping at all <input type="checkbox"/> Eating significantly more or less than usual <input type="checkbox"/> Increase in drug or alcohol use <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties maintaining self-care, such as showering, proper meals, seeing friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Constant worry that is difficult to control, especially about the health and safety of the baby <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties concentrating and making decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Having very harsh or self-critical thoughts <input type="checkbox"/> Having thoughts of harming your baby <input type="checkbox"/> Having thoughts of harming yourself |

If you are noticing some of these signs, it's a good idea to speak to your GP. Postnatal anxiety and depression is very treatable and there are lots of support and treatment options available. Many mums now incorporate mental health care into their routine check ups after giving birth.

Taking Care of Yourself After Birth

The newborn phase is one of the most difficult times in parenthood, and although it will eventually pass, there are some things you can do to look after yourself as you move through it.

The postnatal period involves many emotional and physical changes. Understanding and meeting your needs is essential for sustaining your and your family's wellbeing.

REST

Exhaustion comes with the job of being a new parent, so it's essential to rest when possible to give your body time to physically and emotionally recharge. This may mean closing your eyes and resting on the couch, or letting someone help with the baby or housework so you can have a nap. Remember that rest is more important than the dirty dishes in the sink.

NUTRITION

It is not uncommon for meals to be missed when tired or stressed. Ensuring you eat regularly and well is vital for maintaining energy levels. Many mums struggle to have 3 main meals a day. It may be more achievable to have 5 smaller meals throughout the day. Having food pre-prepared can come in handy.

ACTIVITY

Getting outside for light walks and doing postpartum exercises (as recommended by your health professional) can help with mood and physical recovery post-birth.

SUPPORT

New babies are a lot of work. Letting your partner, family, friends or paid support help with responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning or shopping can allow you to focus on yourself and your baby. This may mean learning to acknowledge your limitations and accepting help from others if this does not come naturally.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Giving your baby the best care means being able to look after yourself in the process. Give yourself permission to eat well, rest, shower, see friends and have breaks. Be kind, patient and gentle with the way you speak to yourself. If this is something you struggle with, consider how you would speak to a friend going through a challenging situation. Remember that this newborn phase is difficult, but it will certainly pass.

Building Your Support Network

Similar to the phrase 'it takes a village to raise a child', parents need their own team to support them through parenthood.

When adjusting to life as a new parent, it's helpful to have different sources of support - from information and advice, having a space to talk about experiences and difficulties, to even a healthy distraction.

Some key supports may include:

- Family
- Friends
- Other new parents (friends, colleagues, mum groups)
- Community or religious groups
- Interest or sporting groups
- Health professionals (GP, Pediatrician, Midwife, Psychologist)
- Maternal and child health clinic
- Phone and online support services (PANDA, Gidget, BeyondBlue)
- Hired help (cleaning, childcare)

Many people find that they need to broaden their existing support network once the baby arrives to meet their changing needs. We all need multiple sources of support, as no one source or relationship can possibly meet all of our needs all of the time.

Getting support

If you are noticing your difficulties have persisted for longer than 2 weeks, are getting worse over time, or are making it hard to complete everyday tasks and care for your baby - these are signs that more support is needed.

There is no need to suffer alone, help is available. It's best to act early for you and your family's wellbeing.

- Find a professional trained in perinatal mental health via the e-COPE directory: www.cope.org.au/e-cope-directory/search/
- Find a child health centre via Pregnancy Birth & Baby: www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/child-health-centres
- Find a health professional or health service via BeyondBlue: www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/find-a-professional

Additional Services

- PANDA supports women and their families who are suffering perinatal anxiety or depression
1300 726 396
www.panda.org.au

- Gidget Foundation supports the emotional wellbeing of expecting and new parents
1300 851 758
www.gidgetfoundation.org.au
- Healthy Families (BeyondBlue) provides information and support to parents, guardians and families, and support for mental health and wellbeing
1300 224 636
www.healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au
- Centre of Perinatal Excellence (COPE) provides support for the emotional challenges of becoming a parent
www.cope.org.au
- What Were We Thinking (WWWT; Monash University) provides information and resources for new parents
www.whatwerewethinking.org.au