

Fife Clinical

Psychology Department



# **Depression during Pregnancy (Antenatal Depression)**

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# Depression during Pregnancy

## (Antenatal Depression)

This leaflet aims to give you information about **depression during pregnancy** (also known as Antenatal Depression).

If you are struggling with Antenatal Depression it is important to tell your GP or Midwife about how you are feeling. You may decide you need more support and want to be referred to a therapist. Your GP will be able to arrange this for you. Depression during pregnancy (Antenatal Depression) is just as common as Postnatal Depression, but far less well known. It is thought that more than one in ten women will struggle with symptoms of depression during pregnancy. Unfortunately, because Antenatal Depression is talked about less than Postnatal Depression, woman may not be asked about how they are feeling or may be scared to admit to their feelings. People often expect woman to see pregnancy as a time of joy and think they should feel “blooming.” Or people might say “Don’t worry, it’s just your hormones!” This can make it hard to admit you are not feeling happy and that there is a problem.

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### Signs of Antenatal Depression

These are some of the signs or symptoms you may experience if you have antenatal depression:

#### ***Changes in your emotions or feelings***

- Feeling sad, upset, numb, disconnected, despairing
- Feeling that you can’t cope as well as normal
- Feelings of guilt and inadequacy (e.g. about having negative feelings when you have just had a baby)
- Crying a lot *or* feeling unable to cry
- Loss of interest and enjoyment in things you previously enjoyed
- Feeling alone even in company
- Feelings of anger, frustration or irritability

#### ***Changes in your thoughts***

- Losing confidence in yourself
- Expecting the worst and having negative or gloomy thoughts
- Thinking that everything seems hopeless
- Thoughts of suicide
- Thinking you hate yourself

### ***Changes in your body***

- Poor memory or concentration
- Restlessness
- Poor sleep
- Feeling worse at a particular time of day (usually morning)
- Changes in appetite
- Tearfulness

### ***Changes in your behaviour***

- Finding it difficult to do even the simplest of things
- Not doing your normal activities because of how you are feeling
- Cutting yourself off from other people
- Being inactive; just sitting doing nothing for long periods of time
- Finding it difficult to see the funny side of things

It is important to note that not everyone who is depressed has all of these symptoms. However if you experience several of the symptoms listed above, and these are not getting better over time then you may be suffering from depression. It is important that you take steps to help yourself and/or seek help from others.

### **What causes Depression?**

We do not know exactly what causes depression. Most people believe that the changes in levels of hormones during pregnancy can affect mood but this is usually not the only reason. Usually there is more than one reason and this differs from person to person. Sometimes depression can start without any obvious cause. Psychological and social factors are important. For example, social isolation, not having a supportive partner or a good support network can be a risk factor. If

you have had depression in the past then this can also make you more likely to have postnatal depression.

Depression is likely to be caused by a combination of things, including:

- Family history of depression
- Hormonal changes during pregnancy and after the birth
- Psychological factors (e.g. low self esteem, difficult childhood experiences)
- Social factors (e.g. relationship difficulties, being in an abusive relationship, lack of support from family /friends, social isolation)
- Stressful life events (e.g. illness, bereavement, job loss)
- Circumstances (e.g. money worries, physical illness, unemployment).

### **Are some people more likely to become depressed than others?**

Some people seem to be more vulnerable than others to develop depression. This may be because of body make up (including body chemistry) or because of early life experiences and family influences. Some people may be generally more inclined to “look on the gloomy side” of life, and this may make them more likely to develop depression.

### **How can you help yourself to feel better if you are suffering from depression?**

Even if you have a doctor or mental health worker involved in your treatment there are things you can do to help yourself in overcoming depression.

#### **1) Do something active**

**Physical activity** helps us feel better. Introducing physical activity into your daily routine will begin to make you feel less tired and more energised. Plan to do 15 or 20 minutes of activity every day, or every other day, to begin with and build this up over time. The trick is to force yourself to do some activity, even though you don't feel like it. If you are not used to exercising, walking can be the easiest form of exercise to do. Going for a walk can be quite therapeutic if you have a lot on your mind.

Getting out of the house and breathing in a bit of fresh air (even in winter) can help you to feel better. Swimming is another good form of gentle exercise.

**Yoga** is recommended if you are suffering from depression and there are specific courses for women who are pregnant. Yoga encourages both physical and mental well being by combining gentle stretching with breathing, meditation and relaxation techniques. Contact the 'British Wheel of Yoga' ([www.bwy.org.uk](http://www.bwy.org.uk)) or look out for classes at your local sports centre. These sorts of classes also provide a good opportunity for meeting other mothers to be.

It is important to make sure life is not all chores and no enjoyment. Try to think about doing relaxing activities that you enjoy that you could do around the house or fit into your day. For example, take a bath, read a magazine, go for a swim, do your nails. **Be kind to yourself.** You are not feeling your usual self. If you had flu or a bad cold you would try and do something nice to make yourself feel a little better. Try and 'treat' yourself by doing something you enjoy each day. Try introducing some **relaxation** exercise into your daily routine. There is a separate information leaflet on relaxation and audio recordings of exercises at [www.moodcafe.co.uk](http://www.moodcafe.co.uk)

You can also ask your GP for a copy of the psychology department relaxation CD.

**The following questions might be helpful to consider:**

What do you enjoy?

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.....  
.....  
.....

What could you do today, even for 10 minutes?

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Sometimes it is better to **do in spite of how you feel**. After the activity, ask yourself – How do I feel? Better? Worse? The same?

If worse, try something else.

## **2) Talk to others**

We know that a lack of social support contributes to depression. Try and tell those close to you how you are feeling. They may be able to listen and help you to think things through. You may be surprised to find those you talk to have also felt depressed at some time and can understand how you feel. We are often reluctant to share our feelings with others because we don't want to worry or burden them. However, people are often relieved when you finally open up to them. It may help to let them read this booklet.

## **3) Look after yourself**

Resist the temptation to cope with depression by turning to alcohol, misusing medication or turning to illegal drugs. These may give some immediate relief but quite soon create further health and psychological problems for you to cope with. They are also damaging to your unborn baby.

Eat well; a **good diet** will keep you in good health so recovery is easier. It can be easy to skip meals, binge on junk food or pick at food throughout the day. Aim to eat 3 meals and 2-3 snacks every day. Make sure that you drink enough fluid to avoid dehydration. Try to add an extra litre of water to your usual intake of fluid each day. Remember too many drinks that are high in caffeine (such as tea, coffee and fizzy drinks) will cause you to be dehydrated, can interfere with your sleep and can cause headaches.

#### 4) Challenging negative thinking

It is very common for people who are suffering from depression to think more negatively than usual and to expect the worst. Negative thinking makes depression worse because the thoughts are usually not a realistic reflection of what is actually happening. It's almost as if the depression causes you to look at the world through a different pair of eyes; ones that put a negative slant on things.

It is important that you try not to simply accept these thoughts as if they are facts. Instead try to:

- Learn to recognise when your mood is getting lower and try to identify what could have triggered the change in your mood or the increase in negative thinking?
- Write down the unpleasant or negative thoughts
- Try and counter these thoughts by writing down arguments against them. Imagine what you would say to a friend if they had the same negative thoughts about themselves
- Try and keep a diary of things you have enjoyed or achieved during the week. This can help you to concentrate on some of the good things in your life and not just the bad things

**Below is an example of how you might do this:**

Feeling	Unpleasant Thought	Arguments against the unpleasant thought	What's gone well recently?
<i>Low, grumpy</i>	<i>My friends never phones these days</i>	<i>They are probably just busy and this is not a sign they don't care. I haven't phoned them either.</i>	<i>I've managed to go for a walk each day.</i>

This is not just about saying 'look on the bright side' or 'think positively.' What we know is that when people are depressed they have a darker, more negative view of themselves and the world in general. If you can learn to recognise these negative thinking patterns, begin to question them and build up a more realistic view of things, then your mood should begin to lift. If you just accept the negative thoughts without checking out how accurate they are, then this will feed into the depression.

## **What treatment is available for depression?**

### **Overcome your fear of asking for help**

Many pregnant women are scared to tell their GP about how they are feeling. Women often feel ashamed or embarrassed at having negative feelings about becoming a mother or worry that they will be seen as an unfit mother. In fact, professionals would prefer you to tell them about any negative feelings, rather than waiting until your depression becomes more severe. You will not be condemned as an unfit mother. Your GP or Midwife will be able to offer support and advice. If you have a bad experience opening up to a professional, do not give up – try to speak to someone else. There is support and help out there for you.

### **Self Help**

Self Help (such as reading this leaflet or recommended books and web sites) is an option that some women prefer to try as a first step. You will find a list of recommended books and websites at the end of this leaflet. A number of these books are also part of the book prescription scheme. This means that your GP or Midwife can 'prescribe' you a self help book which you can then get out of the library. Further details are available at [www.moodcafe.co.uk](http://www.moodcafe.co.uk) or you can ask your GP or Midwife. However, if you find that self help is not enough and your symptoms of depression are not lifting then it is important that you speak to your GP or Midwife about how you are feeling.

### **Medication**

Anti-depressant medication may be an option to consider. These can help to take the edge off some of the symptoms by increasing a chemical called "serotonin" in the brain. People often worry in case anti

depressants are addictive so they are reluctant to try them. Anti-depressants are **not addictive** – you will be able to come off them whenever you and your GP decide the time is right. If you are pregnant then you will need to discuss the options with your GP.

### **Talking Treatment**

Talking therapies have been proven to be a recommended treatment for postnatal depression. If you tell your GP or Midwife about how you are feeling, they will be able to refer you to a local therapist for an assessment. Usually pregnant women are prioritised for treatment but you may still have to wait a few weeks, so the sooner you open up about your feelings, the sooner you will receive help.

The talking treatments are usually counselling or therapy. Counselling or therapy involves talking to a trained health professional about your feelings and experiences. They will help you understand your difficulties and begin to work out ways of overcoming the depression. 'Cognitive Behavioural Therapy' (CBT) is one kind of therapy that is often used in the treatment of depression. Whatever type of therapy is used, it will usually take a little time before you begin to feel the benefits, but treatment of this kind has helped many people and can be very effective.

**Remember, you are not alone. The first step is to acknowledge you have a problem and be brave enough to seek help. This is often the most difficult part of overcoming depression but will help you on the road to recovery.**

## **Further help**

### *Useful Websites:*

#### **Postnatal Illness Org UK:**

<http://www.pni.org.uk/>

This is written by women who have suffered or are suffering from postnatal illness, and gives useful accounts based on people's own experiences. However, a word of caution – as this has not been written by medical professionals, some of the factual information may not always be entirely accurate so check anything you are not sure about with your GP or midwife.

#### **NHS 24:**

[http://www.nhs24.com/content/default.asp?page=s5\\_4&articleID=429](http://www.nhs24.com/content/default.asp?page=s5_4&articleID=429)

This provides good clear information about the symptoms, causes, diagnosis, and treatment of postnatal depression.

#### **'Mind' website:**

[http://www.mind.org.uk/help/diagnoses\\_and\\_conditions/post-natal\\_depression](http://www.mind.org.uk/help/diagnoses_and_conditions/post-natal_depression)

Good clear information about postnatal depression.

**The following websites are interactive websites which use cognitive behavioural techniques to help you work through your problems online:**

[www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk)

This site is designed to help you think about emotional problems and work towards solving them

[www.moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au)

An excellent (Australian) site that helps you identify problem emotions and develop better coping skills. The site is very informative and is fun to use and good for all ages.

[www.livinglifetothefull.com](http://www.livinglifetothefull.com)

This is an online cognitive behavioural therapy programme for people with anxiety and depression and includes: Understanding why we feel as we do / Practical problem solving skills / Using Anxiety Control Training relaxation / Overcoming Reduced activity / Helpful and Unhelpful behaviours / Using Medication effectively / Noticing unhelpful thoughts / Changing unhelpful thoughts / Healthy living - sleep, food, diet and exercise / Staying well.

### **Other websites you might find helpful:**

#### **Depression Alliance website:**

[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

Although this is not written specifically for antenatal or postnatal difficulties it contains good information about symptoms and treatments of depression as well as Depression Alliance campaigns and local groups.

#### **Living in Fife:**

[www.livinginfife.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.livinginfife.scot.nhs.uk)

The Living in Fife Website has been designed specifically for people living in Fife. It provides both local and national information about support services.

#### **Scottish Marriage Care:**

<http://www.scottishmarriagecare.org/>

Scottish Marriage Care provide relationship counselling to couples and individuals all over Scotland.

## **Relationships Scotland:**

<http://www.relationships-scotland.org.uk/index.shtml>

Relationships Scotland offer confidential relationship counselling and sexual therapy for couples and individuals.

## **Fife Clinical Psychology Department Website**

<http://www.dwfchp.scot.nhs.uk/psychology>

### *Useful Self Help Books:*

The following books are available in all Fife libraries or can be purchased from most good book stores. A number of the books below are also part of the Fife book prescription scheme. This means that your GP can 'prescribe' you a self help book which you can then get out of the library. Further details are available at [www.moodcafe.co.uk](http://www.moodcafe.co.uk) or you can ask your GP.

Curham, S. (2000) Antenatal and postnatal depression. Practical advice and support for all sufferers. Vermilion.

ISBN: 9780091856075

Available as a book prescription

Williams, C., Cantwell, R. & Robertson, K. (2009). Overcoming postnatal depression. A five areas approach. Hodder Arnold.

ISBN: 978-0-340-97234-2

Available as a book prescription

Aitken, C. (2000). Surviving post-natal depression: At home, no one hears you scream. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

ISBN: 978 1 85302 861 8

Available as a book prescription

Nicolson, P. (2001) Postnatal depression: Facing the paradox of loss, happiness and motherhood. Wiley.

ISBN: 0-471-48527-6

**Below are some more books for depression in general (not specific to antenatal or postnatal period) – but still likely to be useful:**

Burns, D. (2000) Feeling good: The new mood therapy. Avon Books.

ISBN: 0380731762

Available as a book prescription

Butler, G. and Hope, T. (1995) Managing your mind: The mental fitness guide. Oxford.

ISBN: 0192623834 (Chapter 20 is particularly relevant)

Available as a book prescription

Gilbert, P. (2000) Overcoming depression. Constable and Robinson.

ISBN: 1841191256 (Every chapter lists key points at the end. Step-by-step process makes it easy to follow.)

Golant, M. and Golant, S. (1998) What to do when someone you love is depressed. Henry Holt Publishers.

ISBN: 080505829X

Greenberg, D. and Padesky, C. (1995) Mind over mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think. Guilford Press.

ISBN: 0898621283

Available as a book prescription

Rowe, D. (1996) Depression: The way out of your prison. Routledge.

ISBN: 0415144825 (Hard reading in places)

Telephone Help lines:

**The following organisations and help lines may also be useful:**

**Breathing Space** – mental health helpline

(Mon - Thurs: 6pm-2am, Fri – Mon: 6pm-6am) Tel: 0800 83 85 87

**CRUSE Bereavement Care Scotland** - help line for bereaved people and those caring for bereaved people

(Mon - Fri: 9.30am-5pm) Tel: 0845 600 2227

**Depression Alliance Scotland** – helpline for depression

(Mon - Fri: 11am-1pm, 2pm-4pm) Tel: 0845 123 2320

**Bipolar Fellowship Scotland** – help for those experiencing severe depression

(Mon - Fri: 9.30am-3.30pm) Tel: 0141 400 1867

(Mon - Fri: 9am-9pm, Sat: 9.30am-1pm) Tel: 0808 808 4000

**Samaritans** – confidential support for anyone in a crisis

24 hours Tel: 08457 90 90 90

Textphone: 08457 90 91 92