

Postnatal Depression in Dads

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This leaflet aims to give you information about **Postnatal Depression in Dads**.

If you are struggling with Depression following the birth of your baby then it is important to tell your GP 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.

What is Paternal Postnatal Depression?

Postnatal Depression is not limited to women following childbirth, some men experience it too and this is known as Paternal Postnatal Depression. In the first two months after birth it is thought that up to a quarter of men may experience symptoms of depression. Many things can affect how likely this is to happen such as stress, biological factors (men have hormonal changes at this time too), lack of support or being excluded from the new relationship between the mother and baby. If you feel depressed, do not be afraid to get help. Treating your depression will help you feel happier and more settled in your new role as a father.

How to Recognise Paternal Postnatal Depression?

It is thought that the symptoms of Paternal Postnatal Depression are similar to Maternal Postnatal Depression and can include:

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 (which may affect your relationship)

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
- Worrying about not feeling love towards your baby

Changes in your body

- Poor memory or concentration
- Restlessness
- Poor sleep (which is not due to your baby waking in the night)
- 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
- Having difficulty bonding with your baby
- 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
- You may find that you become quite obsessive about certain routines (such as cleaning)

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. Paternal Postnatal Depression does not always happen straight after your child is born. It may take longer to develop than Maternal Postnatal Depression. It is important that you take steps to help yourself and/or seek help from others.

What Causes Paternal Postnatal Depression?

There is no single answer as to what causes paternal postnatal depression. However, in the weeks following the birth there are many things that can make Paternal Postnatal Depression more likely.

Role Change

Fathers have a lot to adjust to when they become a father and it can feel overwhelming and stressful. You may be worrying about the increase in responsibility for supporting your new family. You will have less spare time now that you are taking care of a baby and developing new routines so your day-to-day life is likely to be different. This can affect your social life and leave you feeling quite isolated or frustrated. The fact that your partner is now very focussed on the baby may also leave you feeling left out and unsure of your new role as a father. Your relationship will have changed, which may lead to an increase in arguments and stress at home.

Previous Emotional Difficulties

If you have had depression in the past then you may be more likely to experience depression again as this is a time of change and adjustment. Sometimes having a baby can trigger difficult memories about your own childhood and this can leave you feeling upset or overwhelmed. Low self esteem may also make you feel less able to adjust to your new role as a father and the challenges that come with it.

Lack of Sleep

You will find you may get a lot less sleep than you are used to when you have a new baby. This can contribute to Postnatal Depression.

Living with a partner who is depressed

If your partner has Postnatal Depression then you may be more likely to develop depression too. Living with someone who is suffering from depression is difficult and this may begin to get you down. It is also likely to affect your relationship. You may feel that people may seem more concerned with the wellbeing of your partner and the new baby. It is important that you get the support and help that you need.

Hormones

You will know that your partner's hormones change during pregnancy and after the baby is born but, believe it or not, yours do too! During the period of time after birth men's hormones (such as testosterone and cortisol) increase in the body which can leave more vulnerable to becoming depressed.

Helping Yourself

You can get help through your GP but there are also things you can do to help yourself feel better. At the end of this leaflet there are a number of websites, books and help lines which you may find useful. A number of books are part of the Fife 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 on the Mood cafe website or you can ask your GP or Midwife. The suggestions below contain helpful advice or activities which might also help.

1) Talk to your partner

We know that a lack of social support contributes to depression. It is important to try and let your partner know how you feel. This will help them be more supportive and comforting as it will help them understand why you may have been acting differently. If you can, let your partner know what you are thinking about your new role as a father and the changes to your life. 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.

2) Talk to other fathers

There are fewer opportunities for new fathers to meet up (compared to new mothers) but you may have friends or family members who you can talk to. It can be helpful to talk about how you are finding things and ask about their experiences of adjusting to becoming a father.

3) Stay involved

Although the new baby will likely be taking up most of your partner's time it is important that you spend time with both mother and baby. Spending time with the baby may be difficult when you are feeling depressed but it is important. Not spending time with your baby can make it harder to bond. This will increase the feelings of distance that often occurs in depression.

Try to find ways to spend time together as a couple, even if it is only now and again. Perhaps you can arrange for a babysitter so that you can go out for the evening or plan to cook a meal / watch a film together once the baby is in bed. Try to resist using any spare time to catch up on household chores and prioritise spending time together relaxing as a couple. When so many things in your life have changed, it is important to still do some of the things you used to do as a couple to keep some sense of normality.

4) Do something active

Physical activity helps us feel better. If you are used to exercising then try to make time to fit this into your day. Any kind of exercise that increases your heart rate will help you feel better (e.g. going to the gym, jogging, cycling, swimming). If you are not someone who exercised prior to having the baby then try to find ways of introducing physical activity into your daily routine. This 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 with a new baby. Going for a walk often helps to settle the baby and 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.

The following questions might be helpful to consider:

What activities 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 it in spite of how you feel**. After the activity, ask yourself – How do I feel? Better? Worse? The same? If worse, try something else.

5) 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.

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.

Try to keep in touch with your friends (even if it is less frequent) and find ways to keep up your hobbies and interests as much as you can.

6) 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?

There are many treatments available to help you beat your depression. The self help activities suggested in this leaflet may help you feel less depressed. The supports listed at the end of the leaflet can also be useful. If these do not work then the next step is seeing your GP to get professional help. When you see your GP it is important to let them know how you are feeling and how it is affecting your life. This might be quite hard to do but it will mean the GP is more able to help you. If your GP is not helpful then do not give up. Make an appointment with another GP instead.

Medication

Anti-depressant medication may be an option to consider. These medications 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.

Talking Treatment

Talking therapies have been proven to be a recommended treatment for postnatal depression. If you tell your GP about how you are feeling, they will be able to refer you to a local therapist for an assessment.

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:

The following websites give advice, information and support for fathers with Postnatal Depression:

Dad Info:

<http://www.dad.info/health/your-health/post-natal-depression-dads/>

Information on Postnatal Depression in fathers

Net Mums:

<http://www.netmums.com/pnd>

Contains a section on Postnatal Depression in fathers

'Mind' website:

http://www.mind.org.uk/help/diagnoses_and_conditions/post-natal_depression

Good clear information about Postnatal Depression, including a small section about fathers who become depressed.

Other websites you might find helpful:

Living in Fife:

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.

NHS 24:

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.

Depression Alliance website:

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.

Fife Clinical Psychology Department Website

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

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

www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk

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

www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

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

www.livinglifetothefull.com

This site aims to teach life skills using cognitive behavioural techniques 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.

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 on the Moodcafé website or you can ask your GP.

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

ISBN: 9780091856075

(Chapter 4 contains a section on fathers with depression)

Available as a book prescription

Welford, H. (2002) The NCT Book of Postnatal Depression: Feelings After Birth. The National Childbirth Trust.

ISBN: 0-9543018-0-3

(Chapter 4 contains information about fathers with postnatal depression)

Below are some more books for depression in general (not specific to fatherhood) – 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

(An excellent self-help textbook with chapters on all major problem areas and a good CBT & problem solving approach. 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 Helplines:

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

National Debt Helpline – help for anyone in debt or concerned they may fall into debt
(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