



mothers for mothers

postnatal depression support group



We are a group of mothers most of whom have suffered depression or distress after the birth of one or more of our babies. We offer support, advice, information and most of all a listening ear for any worries or concerns you may have.

We are a voluntary group and operate quite separately from health or social services. Anything you say to us is treated confidentially within Mothers for Mothers and we would only reveal any information after discussing it with you and only if we felt somebody was in danger.

We are funded to help mothers in the Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath & North East Somerset areas. If you are outside of this area please feel free to read our information or see our website links section to find sources of support and advice for postnatal depression.

Our group was set up by mothers who had suffered from Postnatal Depression and had felt alone, isolated and believed they were the only ones not coping, and that they were failing as mothers. Our aim is to give mothers someone to talk to who will understand how you are feeling. Having suffered themselves our volunteers can offer you the reassurance that you will recover, sympathise with how you are feeling and suggest ways of coping to help get you through these difficult times.

Remember you are not alone and you will get better.

About Postnatal Depression

Do you have Postnatal Illness?

Have you recently had a baby and have suffered from these symptoms?

Anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, feeling low, sleeplessness, longing to sleep, unable to cope, irritable, aches and pains of unknown cause, unusual thoughts or fears, loss of interest in sex, lack of concentration.

You may be suffering from Postnatal Depression. You are not alone.

Remember it is now thought that as many as 3 in 10 mothers suffer some form of depression or distress after having a baby. It occurs for a number of complex reasons, one of which is the huge adjustment that a mother needs to make after the baby arrives.

What is Postnatal Illness? - also known as Postnatal Depression

Postnatal Illness (PNI) is a term which covers three types of problems which occur after childbirth the Blues, Postnatal Depression and Puerperal Psychosis.

The Blues

Third or fourth day blues affect most women after childbirth. The Blues are characterised by weepiness, irritability and mild depression; some mothers feel very anxious and tense. It has been suggested that this form of Postnatal Depression is associated with rapid but normal hormonal changes in the body in the first few days after delivery, The Blues, though disturbing to a new mother, are



not serious and usually resolve after a few days. Mothers should be allowed to cry and talk about their worries. A

mother should not be told to "pull herself together"; she needs rest and reassurance.

Postnatal Depression

This occurs in one in ten mothers and can start within six weeks of delivery but may also show itself much later. Symptoms may include despondency, sleeping and eating difficulties, feelings of guilt and inadequacy particularly, in relation to the new baby, loss of sexual interest. Most depressed mothers feel very tired and lack energy. Often they feel unable to concentrate and find even simple tasks difficult and confusing. Sometimes a mother will experience panic attacks or feel that she is going mad, or she

may have inexplicable aches and pains. She needs to be encouraged to believe that she will get better with time, and reassured that the illness is not her fault.

Please contact Mothers for Mothers and arrange to talk to someone who can help. Our organisation was set up by mothers with Postnatal Illness.

A Health Visitor may observe the mother's difficulties and suggest that the patient visits her doctor. The treatment offered may include support, practical and psychological as well as antidepressant drugs.

Anti depressants are not addictive, but taken properly for a period of months, help to lift a mother's mood and set her on the road to recovery. She should be encouraged to look after herself by eating properly and having rest and she may find it helpful to talk to other women who have suffered in this way and recovered.

Puerperal Psychosis

This is a severe but luckily rare form of Postnatal Illness. The woman usually starts to think irrationally, her behaviour and symptoms can be so severe that the mother is no longer able to cope with normal life.

Sometimes a mother may be very excited, she may talk very quickly and her ideas may be difficult to follow. She is over-active, doesn't sleep or eat properly. She may become suspicious and if she does not get her own way, aggressive language and behaviour may result. She will not be thinking logically and may appear very different from her usual self. Occasionally she may suffer from false beliefs or think

that she is seeing or hearing visions. Some mothers may become suicidal and in extreme cases there may be a risk to a child. It is vital that medical help is sought. Treatment may involve hospitalisation. ECT and major tranquillisers may be given.

Remember the above are all forms of illness from which a mother will recover.

Know when to ask for medical help

The illness may be affecting the whole family, or there may be a risk of rejecting the baby or risk of harm to herself or to other members of the family.

Be wary if the mother feels distant or cut off from what is happening. This can lead to state of withdrawal from reality, where the mother starts to live in a world of her own.



Requesting Help

Helpline 0117 975 6006

At times one can feel quite desperate and hopeless and we have often found that it is great comfort to have someone available to talk, who understands what you are going through and who may be able to help you untangle a muddle of thoughts and feelings. Please do allow yourself to phone us. Sharing can make such feelings and worries easier to bear.

We have a telephone in our office which is answered by a mother who is trained in listening skills. Office hours are between 9.30 am - 12.30 pm Monday to Friday.

Helpline: Between 2.30 pm and 9.00pm Monday to Thursday our telephone line is diverted to a volunteer's home and she is available to talk to you during these hours. At other times an answer machine service operates.

Open Houses and Dropins

We occasionally organise a morning gathering in one of our member's houses or alternative venues. This is an opportunity to meet other mothers who have contacted us, for a chat in a supportive environment. Babies and young children are welcome. Do contact us if you are interested.

Counselling

If you have Postnatal Illness/Depression it can be very beneficial to talk about the illness. Talking with your family and friends may be helpful but professional counselling is another option.

Counselling offers a safe place to confide and offload your problems to an unbiased and empathic listener.

It cannot change the external pressures surrounding you, but it may help you to find ways to cope with difficulties.

It can also give an insight into the way your behaviour affects others, and how their behaviour impacts on you. It can help you see the bigger picture.

We offer counselling at the Wellsprings Healthy Living Centre in Barton Hill and also in our offices in the city centre (there is limited access to the room as it is up two flights of stairs). We also offer support groups in Bristol in Barton Hill and Bedminster.

Groups

Wellsprings Healthy Living Centre, Beam St, Barton Hill, Bristol. Tuesday mornings 10am-12am. St Aldhelms church, Aubrey Rd, Bedminster, Bristol. Thursday afternoons 1.15pm - 2.45pm.

Other Support Services - we offer home visits, and a counselling service - some mums find it very helpful to have some time and space for themselves in which to talk about their feelings please contact the office for further details.

Supporters

We may be able to introduce a new mother to a supporter, preferably someone who has had similar experiences or who lives locally. A supporter will offer to contact you each week and so keep in touch with you. At any stage, if you are feeling that this relationship is not working for you, please do contact us at

the office. When their difficult times have passed, many mothers offer to support another mother who is in trouble.

You will need positive and practical help

The first step is to admit that you are ill, however desperately you want to feel normal. Remind yourself that you will get better, but it takes time.

Don't feel guilty or ashamed about the way you feel. PNI is a condition you can recover from; the prognosis is good. You certainly are not alone in suffering; at least 1 in 10 mothers suffer some form of the illness. You may feel as though you are going mad but this is only part of the illness and will pass.

Remember, you will get better

You will need plenty of encouragement, reassurance and positive help. Try to float through the bad days and don't be discouraged. Tomorrow could be your best day yet.

You will go back to being a caring, capable and confident person. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

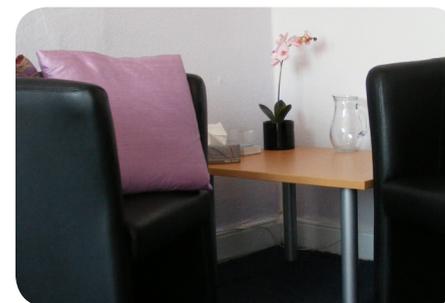
Treat yourself kindly. Doing something you enjoy in your own right is all part of the healing process. Be kind to yourself: indulge in a new hair do, or treat yourself to some nice flowers or nice food. Attend the local sports centre where there are often crèche facilities available. Taking exercise can really help, even going for a walk.

REMEMBER do not be too hard on yourself; you can't help being ill. This is very important as mothers experience

such needless feelings of guilt about suffering from PNI. It should be treated no differently from any other illness.

Try not to compare yourself with others mothers. We all recover at different rates but you will get there in the end. Try to let time pass and the healing process will take place.

If partners find it difficult to understand it may be helpful for them to visit your GP who can explain the problem.



Advice for Partners, Family and Friends

How the partner, family and friends can help a mother suffering from postnatal illness or depression.

Encourage the mother to see her GP or Health Visitor if she has not done so already. Unless she is happy about being alone, try to make sure that a mother with postnatal depression does not have to cope by herself. She will find coping much harder on her own and she is potentially at risk. Sometimes a Health Visitor can arrange help in the home.

Let her talk about her feelings and anxieties. No matter how irrational they may seem. They are real enough to her, so don't dismiss them. Don't try to reason with her, mothers suffering from postnatal depression may find it difficult to think logically. Don't say things like "pull yourself together". This is just what she is unable to do, and she is probably feeling guilty about it.

If you have not had depression yourself it can be very hard to understand, and can also be frightening. Try and be as patient and understanding as you can be. Why not talk to others who have suffered, and don't be ashamed to mention the word depression. Talking to someone else might help you to understand.

She really needs to know and believe that you love her and that everyone will stand by her what ever. Do not make her feel that her depression is her fault and that

only she can make herself better. Try to give gentle and constant encouragement. Try not to criticise her, pointing out all the jobs she has left undone, this will only make her feel worse or a failure.

Her self confidence may be low so try to boost it and help her self esteem. When she looks nice, tell her so! When she does something good, tell her! We all have good qualities and talents. Try to be positive about the things she is good at. If it is at all possible, try to arrange some quality time together, such as a meal out, trip to the cinema, or a walk in the park.

Practical ways you can help

Make sure that she is eating properly. After childbirth a mother needs to build up reserves of vitamins and minerals. She may have a poor appetite or be unable to get round to eating. You could prepare her food for her so that all she needs to do is eat it. Shopping or cooking can help. Encourage her to treat herself.

Try to encourage her to take time to relax regularly. Relaxation exercises could benefit you both, so why not try doing relaxation classes together? When she is feeling particularly depressed she may not feel that relaxation exercises will help. It wouldn't be an instant cure, but it will help, perhaps slowly at first, but it is worth trying and it is worth giving it time to work.

Let her spend as much time with the baby as she wants without worrying about other tasks. Try to share/delegate other jobs such as cleaning, washing etc amongst friends and family. During the daytime, make sure she takes time to rest if you do take the baby, rather than trying to catch up with the housework.

Offer to have the baby if the mother is happy about it. Try to take turns with changing and washing the baby and feeding if possible so one of you gets a good nights rest. Encourage her to get out, with or without the baby or to go out with friends, but don't force her to go out if she does not feel up to it.

Sometimes, something as simple and obvious as a hug or a cuddle can help. We all like to be held and cuddled from time to time, not in a sexual way, but in a protective and caring way. The occasional cuddle will not suddenly make all your troubles go away, but it helps and feels good! Other children can help here too, once they know that "Mummy is feeling poorly" or Mummy is feeling sad they will usually help with cuddles as well. It



is important that they realise that Mummy is ill and it is not their fault, they need reassuring that they are loved as well.

She will be better one day! It does not happen overnight, it can happen so gradually that you cannot put a date or time to it. The good days appear more, the bad ones less. When she begins to have a few good days in a row she will then probably have the odd bad day. Don't be cross with her. It is part of the gradual process of getting better. Justly gently remind her that better days are ahead.

Try to give lots of encouragement and praise. If she achieves something that day, no matter how small it may seem to you, give praise where it is due, but without patronising. Depression tends to

make the sufferer ignore the good things that happen to them and dwell on the negative things, so try to be positive.

As difficult as it can be, try not to show anger or frustration at her depression. When your partner is feeling depressed she will feel very vulnerable and will pick up signs of anger. You will undoubtedly get upset at times - Why not ring our helpline and tell us about your feelings?

Tips for partners, Family and Friends

Be Patient

Postnatal depression is not a disease which can be seen or which can be cured instantly with pills. It takes a lot of time and patience (and indeed hard work) from all parties to bring the family unit through the crisis points which may occur.

No-one is to blame

When the mother feels unable to cope she is not doing it on purpose. Therefore try not to let any extra burdens placed on others cause resentment.

Partners or Carers cannot continually work long days, to do so will only make the situation worse with fatigue.

Get help

Families and friends tend to pitch in if they are made aware of the situation.

Partners can occasionally get depressed too - our telephone line is open to partners, family and friends who may need support in order to support the mother.

Positive Tips

How to help yourself

The first and most important thing you can do to help yourself is to visit your GP. If you feel uncomfortable about confiding in your doctor, remember that he or she sees many mothers suffering the way you are and they are trained to help you.

The best way to help your GP to understand you is to explain your feelings as fully as you can. If you do not feel reassured after the visit then either make another appointment for further advice or, as a last resort, think about changing doctors. The GP is a very important person in your recovery as he or she can offer many effective treatments.

Note: If you are offered medication from your GP you should remember that it can take several weeks for the medication to take effect. It is also very important to feel happy with your medication. If you are in any doubt then consult your GP again, you must consult her/him if you decide to stop taking them or if you wish to cut down.

Rest

Although this is easier said than done, rest is very important in the recovery of PND. Try to enlist the help of family and friends to look after the baby while you lie down. Don't try to catch up on any housework while the baby is sleeping, use the time to nap as well. If you find it difficult to

relax, your GP or health visitor may be able to refer you to relaxation classes.

Talk

Don't try to hide how you are feeling from people who are close to you, there is no shame in feeling the way you do. Unless people know, they cannot help you.

Diet & Exercise

Eat regular meals and try to include fresh fruit and vegetables every day, Multi vitamins and mineral supplements may help. This is not a time to be thinking of going on a diet, so avoid that at all costs. Exercise can be a great depression lifter, but as with anything don't overdo it.

Contact Us

Helpline

0117 975 6006

Mon-Thurs 2.30pm - 9pm

Email

support@mothersformothers.co.uk

Website

www.mothersformothers.co.uk

Our Office

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