

# Looking after your mental health in pregnancy and after the birth of your baby



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Many women experience emotional changes when they are pregnant or after the birth of their baby. Some of these changes are explained in this leaflet. For further help and support, please contact your health visitor.

## **Baby blues**

During the first week after childbirth many women get what is often called the baby blues. You may feel down or depressed at a time when you expect you should feel happy having a baby to look after. Baby blues are probably due to the sudden hormonal and chemical changes that take place in your body after childbirth. Symptoms can include:

- Feeling emotional and irrational
- Bursting into tears for no apparent reason
- Feeling irritable or touchy
- Feeling depressed or anxious.

All these symptoms are normal and usually only last for a few days.

For some women these emotional changes last longer than a few days and can feel very overwhelming.



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## Perinatal depression

This is a low mood which can start at any point from conception to one year after delivery. It affects 10-15 per cent of mothers, so is relatively common. It can start gradually, or all of a sudden, and can range from mild to very severe, but this feels very different to the baby blues mentioned above.

Symptoms can include:

- Ongoing feeling of sadness and low mood
- Little enjoyment and loss of interest in the wider world
- Little energy and feeling tired all the time
- Trouble sleeping at night, even when your baby is asleep
- Feeling sleepy during the day
- Difficulty bonding with your baby
- Not wanting to see people
- Not wanting to eat, or eating too much
- Problems concentrating and making decisions
- Frightening thoughts, which may include hurting your baby or yourself.

## Perinatal anxiety

This can also start at any point from conception to one year after delivery. All parents worry about their child's health, feeding, and their parenting, but some find it hard to control their worries. If these worries are affecting your daily life this could be anxiety. Symptoms can include:

- Being tense, nervous and on edge
  - Feeling like the world is speeding up or slowing down
  - Worrying that other people can see that you're anxious and are looking at you
  - Your mind is really busy with thoughts
  - Restless and not being able to concentrate
  - Numbness
  - Overthinking negative experiences, or replaying over a situation again and again
  - Having a sense of dread, or fearing the worst.
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## What causes perinatal depression and anxiety?

The cause of perinatal depression and anxiety isn't always clear. However, having a baby is a life-changing event that could trigger depression and or anxiety. It often takes time to adapt to becoming a new parent.

Possible triggers:

- History of mental health problems particularly depression
- Mental health problems during pregnancy
- Having no close family or friends to support you
- Poor relationship with your partner
- Recent stressful life events for example, bereavement
- Experiencing the baby blues.

## Psychosis

Postpartum psychosis is very different to the baby blues and perinatal depression. It is a serious mental illness and should be treated as a medical emergency. Symptoms usually start suddenly within the first two weeks after giving birth. More rarely they can develop several weeks after the birth. Symptoms can include:

- Hallucinations – where someone sees, hear or smells, tastes or feels things that don't exist outside of their mind
- Delusions – thoughts or beliefs that are unlikely to be true
- A manic mood – talking and thinking too much or too quickly, feeling “high” or “on top of the world”
- A low mood – showing signs of depression, being withdrawn, tearful, anxiety, trouble sleeping
- Feeling suspicious or fearful
- Feeling very confused
- Behaving in a way that's out of character.

With the right support, most women fully recover.

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## Partners can feel depressed too

Studies suggest that up to one in five partners can suffer from postnatal depression. Partners might develop a mental health problem when becoming a parent for similar reasons to mothers:

Partners might also be coping with:

- Extra responsibilities around the house
- Financial pressures
- Changing relationship with your partner
- Lack of sleep.

## What can I do to help myself?

- Talk to family and friends about how you are feeling, and how they can help
- Make time for you to do something you enjoy
- Rest whenever you can and try and get as much sleep as possible during the night
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Psychological therapy – your midwife, health visitor or GP may recommend a self-help course, or refer you for a course of therapy such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Antidepressants – these may be recommended if your depression is more severe or other treatments haven't worked. Often a combination of medication and psychological therapy can be very effective.



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## For further local and national information and support contact:

### **Contact your Health Visitor (contact number is in your child's red book).**

If you do not have that information please call the Lewisham Health Visitor hub who will be able to give you the contact details for your HV.

#### **Lewisham Health Visitor hub**

020 3049 1873

Mon-Fri 8am-6pm

### **SLaM (South London and Maudsley) free 24-hour mental health helpline**

0800 731 2864. For patients, carers and anyone who needs advice and help while in crisis or facing difficulties dealing with mental illness.

### **IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) Self-referral**

020 3049 2000. For adults 18 years plus, registered with a Lewisham GP.  
[www.slam-iapt.nhs.uk/lewisham/accessing-the-service](http://www.slam-iapt.nhs.uk/lewisham/accessing-the-service)

### **Action for Post-Partum Psychosis**

[www.app-network.org/what-is-pp/getting-help](http://www.app-network.org/what-is-pp/getting-help)

### **Mindful Mums Group, run by Bromley and Lewisham MIND**

[www.blmind.org.uk/mindful-mums](http://www.blmind.org.uk/mindful-mums)

### **The Association for Post Natal Illness (APNI)**

020 7386 0868

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

### **Pre and Postnatal Depression Advice and Support (PANDAS)**

0843 28 98 401

[www.pandasfoundation.org.uk/how-we-can-help](http://www.pandasfoundation.org.uk/how-we-can-help)

### **Anxiety UK**

08444 775774

Text service on 07537 416905

Email:[info@anxietyuk.org.uk](mailto:info@anxietyuk.org.uk)

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## Notes

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## Disclaimer

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is in no way intended to replace professional clinical advice by a qualified practitioner.

If you would like this information in another language or another format such as braille, large print or an electronic or audio file, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on **020 8333 3355** for University Hospital Lewisham or **020 8836 4592** for Queen Elizabeth Hospital or email **LG.pals@nhs.net**

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