

# Emotional Support in Pregnancy

Information for parents

- ⓘ For more information, please contact your midwife

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Why is emotional wellbeing important?.....	5
When should I ask for help? .....	6
What can I do to help?.....	7
Treatment .....	10
What if I have had serious mental health problems in the past, but I am pregnant and feel well? .....	12
For fathers, partners and family members .....	13
What support is there? .....	14
Tell us what you think of this leaflet .....	19
Teaching, training and research.....	19
Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).....	19
Leaflets in alternative languages or formats .....	20

## How might I feel?

- Pregnancy and the birth of a baby can be a happy time; it can be joyful, exciting and rewarding. However, for some, pregnancy can be a worrying time.
- As many as one in four women/birthing people experience emotional difficulties during pregnancy and in the first year after their baby's birth. **This can happen to anyone** and is known as Perinatal mental illness.
- Perinatal mental illness ranges from mild to extremely severe, requiring different pathways, management and care.
- You may find reading this leaflet useful. Please speak to your midwife if you feel you need additional support.

It can be common for pregnant women/birthing people and new parents to experience:

- Low mood, sadness and tearfulness.
- Anxiety, worry and tension.
- Irritability and anger.
- Difficult or unexpected feelings towards your pregnancy or unborn baby.
- Feeling unable to cope or enjoy anything.

- Anxiety about labour or struggling to come to terms with a difficult labour.
- Poor sleep even when your baby sleeps well.
- Thoughts that you are not a good enough parent.
- Worrying thoughts about your baby.

It can be difficult to talk about how you are feeling and ask for help. Common reasons for this might be:

- You may not know what is wrong
- You might feel ashamed that you are not enjoying your baby or coping as you believe you should
- You might be worried that your baby will be taken away if you tell people that you are struggling; this is not a usual response and is very rare.

**Asking for help doesn't mean you can't cope or are not able to care for your child. It is the start of getting the right support to help you to be the parent you want to be.**

# **Why is emotional wellbeing important?**

## **A time of change...**

Physical and hormonal changes during pregnancy and the postnatal period can make it an emotional time. Becoming a parent is a major life change and can create worries about many aspects other of your life – relationships, body changes, finances - lots of things. Feeling emotionally well supports you to deal with the changes.

## **For your baby, too...**

During pregnancy, your baby is exposed to everything you experience - the sounds around you, the air you breathe, the food you eat and the emotions you feel.

When a pregnant woman/birthing person or new parent feels calm, it allows the baby to develop in a happy, calm environment.

# When should I ask for help?

- It is normal to experience ups and downs in your mood during pregnancy and in the year after your baby is born. It is especially common during the first week to 10 days after giving birth. As many as 8 out of 10 people experience a low mood, which can make you feel emotional, tearful, irritable, or anxious. This could be due to tiredness, physical & hormonal changes and adapting to the new responsibility of becoming a parent.

You may wish to contact your Midwife, Health Visitor or GP if you experience other symptoms, such as;

- Feeling more irritable than usual
- Withdrawing from relationships or activities
- Having little energy or problems sleeping
- Worrying a lot or thinking that your future is bleak
- Experiencing thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- Struggling to bond with your baby
- Turning to alcohol or other substances to help you co
- Experiencing unusual thoughts that don't make sense to you or thoughts of suicide.

# What can I do to help?

- **Talk** to someone you trust about how you are feeling.
- Recognise that becoming a parent can be a stressful time and be kind to yourself. **It is not always how we expect it to be** or how the media portrays it.
- Take some time to write a list of how you expected it to be and how it is in reality; are the lists comparable? You may find some useful information on this website: [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)
- Book onto **antenatal classes** - research shows this really helps! Your midwife can advise you how to do this.
- Consider accessing **pregnancy or postnatal exercise classes** and eat a healthy balanced diet. **Have a healthy diet in pregnancy - NHS**
- **Parent and Toddler groups:** your health visitor or local children's centre will have a list of local groups. Find one that suits you. It may be daunting to start with, however statistics show that you won't be the only one that feels like you do so give it a go! Local resources can be found here: [Help & Support | Maternity Voices HNY](#)

- **Online forums:** there are many groups out there online that can provide support but remember that what people choose to post onto social media sites isn't always the whole truth – often they are projecting an image. Some people could find this makes them feel worse; you will know the right thing to do for you.
- **Try to get some sleep.** Getting good sleep with a new baby might sound impossible, but finding time to rest can make a big difference to your mental health. Discussing a plan for achieving sleep with your partner/main support can be useful so you can share the responsibility of your baby in the first few weeks to enable you to rest.
- **Take time to relax.** You might feel like you have no time for yourself but actively taking time to relax can be really helpful. Think about what really helps you unwind, whether it's reading a book, doing some gardening or doing crafts, and try to make a bit of time - even just five minutes – to do something that makes you feel good. See Mind's pages on 'Relaxation' for more ideas. [Relaxation](#)

# **What can others do to help?**

## **Health professionals**

Midwives and other health professionals can provide emotional support to you. Be honest and tell them how you feel, you will not be judged. They are there to listen, to help and refer you to the best support networks and teams (your midwifery team number will be on your Badgernotes)

## **Family**

Support from family and friends is really helpful. Research shows that recovery from mental health issues is a gradual process. We know that time and the support of loved ones can help. Families and relationships can be complicated though, so if you feel unable to share with them, there are support groups you could access detailed at the back of this leaflet.

# Treatment

Treatments for mental health problems are effective for most women. The help which is most appropriate for you will depend on the type and severity of the distress you are experiencing. You can get support and advice about treatment from your midwife, health visitor or GP.

For some women, psychological therapies (see below) can help. For others, medication or a combination of medication and psychological therapy may be most helpful and others will require specialist services.

**Talking Therapies;** This is a nationwide service which offers free, confidential talking therapy for people who have symptoms of anxiety or depression. They give priority to pregnant women and new parents. The back of this leaflet explains more about the service and the help they can offer you if you need it.

**Pregnancy in Mind;** This is an online course run by professionals in the NSPCC, they offer a course of 4 group sessions with 4 telephone check ins and will help with anxieties around your pregnancy. Your midwife can refer you to them anytime between 12 and 26 weeks of pregnancy. Group sessions may seem daunting its common for women to find great comfort in becoming aware that they are not the only one to struggle mentally in pregnancy and friendship groups are often formed.

**Medication**; If you are taking medication for depression, anxiety or other mental health difficulties, you should ideally talk to your doctor (GP) before you become pregnant. However, many pregnancies are unplanned. In that case, you should see your doctor as soon as you know you are pregnant. Do not treat yourself with herbal remedies without consulting your doctor as these may cause harm to your baby. Do not stop your medication without getting advice from your GP or Health Professional. See below link for further advice.

[Bumps - Best use of medicines in pregnancy](#)

**Perinatal Mental Health Team:** This is a specialist mental health team based in the community. They can support with more serious mental health issues in pregnancy and the post natal period for up to 1 year post natal. Your community midwife will be able to make an assessment to see if you meet the criteria for referral to this team.

**Amethyst Team:** This is a small team of specialist midwives in our hospitals who are midwives with extra training to support those struggling with mental health issues in pregnancy and the post natal period up to 8 weeks post natal. They can support with anxieties around giving birth and your baby. Please note however they are not therapists, do not prescribe medication and are not a substitute for services such as Pregnancy in Mind or Talking Therapies. Your Community Midwife will talk to you about your emotional wellbeing and can refer to the Amethyst Team if she and you feel this would be beneficial.

# What if I have had serious mental health problems in the past, but I am pregnant and feel well?

You should discuss this with your GP, midwife or health visitor as you may be referred to a mental health service for discussion and advice if you are pregnant and have ever had:

- A serious mental illness, such as Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, Psychosis or Schizoaffective Disorder. Severe Depression, Anxiety or previous Post Natal Depression, Personality Disorder or Eating Disorder.
- Treatment from a psychiatrist.
- Previous Postpartum Psychosis. Postpartum Psychosis (PP) is a severe, but rare and treatable, form of mental illness which can occur after having a baby. It can happen 'out of the blue' to women without previous experience of mental illness.

There are some groups of women, women with a history of Bipolar Disorder for example, who are at much higher risk. PP normally begins in the first few days to weeks after childbirth. It can get worse very quickly and should always be treated as a medical emergency. Most women need to be treated with medication and admitted to hospital. Support groups are at the back of this booklet. It is important to get specialist advice even if you are well during your pregnancy. Women who have had these

illnesses can have a high risk of becoming unwell after childbirth. Mental health professionals can discuss care and treatment choices with you. They will help make a plan for how to look after your mental health as your pregnancy progresses and when your baby is born.

## **For fathers, partners and family members**

Only mothers can formally be diagnosed with a perinatal mental health problem. However, studies suggest that partners might develop a mental health problem when becoming a parent for similar reasons to mothers. You may struggle with extra responsibilities around the house, financial pressures, a changing relationship with your partner and lack of sleep.

If your partner is also experiencing a mental health problem, this can make it more difficult for you to cope with the changes that becoming a parent brings.

# What support is there?

There are some support groups that you may find helpful at the end of this leaflet. However, you may also find the following suggestions useful:

## **Speak to your doctor about your mental health.**

Your doctor can refer you to local support services, talking treatments and prescribe you medication if required.

## **Look after yourself**

Becoming a new parent can be one of the most stressful experiences in life. Finding ways to look after yourself that fit in with your lifestyle and needs can make a big difference to your mental health. Here are some ideas:

## **Build your support network**

Talking to other new parents and finding that other new parents share the anxieties and frustrations you are experiencing can be reassuring. It can also give you a chance to share skills and experiences, to realise that you are not alone and, above all, to get some emotional and practical support.

## **Find local parent-and-baby groups**

If you're feeling nervous try something based around an activity, music for example, which might make it easier to start talking to other parents.

## **Contact specialist organisations**

Organisations like Home-Start can help new parents to develop their support networks and look after their mental health. You can also speak to your Health Visitor.

## **Access online support**

There are several online communities for parents, people experiencing mental health problems and specifically parents experiencing mental health problems. (However, be aware that social media sites may, for some people, fuel anxieties and low mood when sharing negative experiences).

## **Peer support**

Contact your local Mind to see if they offer any peer support groups. Many organisations run peer support programmes for specific diagnoses. For example, Action Postpartum Psychosis runs a peer support network, and PANDAS runs support groups for perinatal mental health problems.

## Support Groups

- [www.pandasfoundation.org.uk](http://www.pandasfoundation.org.uk) – pre and postnatal depression support group.  
Email; [info@pandasfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@pandasfoundation.org.uk) or contact their helpline on 08432 898401 (9am-8pm)
- [www.tommys.org](http://www.tommys.org) – excellent maternal mental health resource. Email; [mailbox@tommys.org](mailto:mailbox@tommys.org) or contact 020 7398 3400
- [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) - specialist information and support for any mental health issues. Email [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk) or telephone 0300 123 3393 (9am-6pm)
- **The Birth Trauma Association** is a charity that supports women who suffer birth trauma – a shorthand term for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – after birth. Their website has a range of information related to birth trauma and related subjects, and affected individuals can access online support via e-mail at [support@birthtraumaassociation.org.uk](mailto:support@birthtraumaassociation.org.uk).
- [www.bestbeginnings.org.uk](http://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk) - support for yours and your baby's emotional, physical and mental health and well-being.

- [www.app-network.org/peer-support/](http://www.app-network.org/peer-support/) - Action on postpartum Psychosis (APP) offer information and peer support for women and families affected by PP. They also have an online forum ([www.app-network/pptalk](http://www.app-network/pptalk)) where 1:1 email support is offered from someone who has experienced PP.
- [www.nct.org](http://www.nct.org) or **telephone** 0330 330 0772 for advice, support and counselling on all aspects of childbirth and early parenthood
- [www.dadsmatteruk.org](http://www.dadsmatteruk.org) - Dads are just as important on this journey. An online support group for them.
- <https://andysmanclub.co.uk> - are a Men's Mental Health Charity – Offering free-to-attend talking groups for men and challenging the stigmas around Male Mental Health.

# Talking Therapies

- ✓ Rapid access to primary mental health is important. You can [self-refer to Talking Therapies](#) (help with psychological therapies) or [ask your midwife](#) to on your behalf. You may be asked to do a short questionnaire to assess the right course for you.
- ✓ Many people have found [talking therapies helpful](#) for mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and stress.
- ✓ [Evidence confirms](#) that talking therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can be as effective as medication for some mental health problems.
- ✓ While CBT and other face to face talking therapies are widely available privately, you may have to wait to get them on the NHS.
- ✓ For Talking Therapies in Whitby, Scarborough and Ryedale contact (01947) 899270
- ✓ For York Talking Therapies contact (01904) 556840

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Lorraine Dodd, Lead Amethyst Team Midwife, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 721421.

## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net](mailto:yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

# Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

[www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/](http://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/)

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