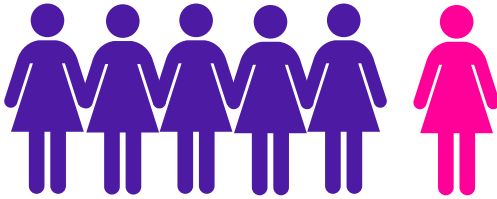


Maternal Mental Health



ABOUT MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

Having a child is a big life event, and it's natural to experience a range of emotions and reactions during and after your pregnancy. If these emotions start to have a negative impact on your daily life, you might be experiencing a mental health problem so it's essential to seek help.



Around **one in five women** will experience a mental health problem **during pregnancy or in the year after giving birth**. This might be a new issue or something you've experienced before. These are known as **perinatal mental health problems**.

It can be really difficult to feel able to talk openly about how you're feeling when you become a new parent. You might feel:

- ⇒ pressure to be happy and excited
- ⇒ like you have to be on top of everything
- ⇒ worried you're a bad parent if you're struggling with your mental health
- ⇒ worried that your baby will be taken away from you if you admit how you're feeling

Don't be afraid to reach out to other mums, you're likely to find that many are feeling the same way.

TYPES OF MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

Here are some particularly common conditions that are specifically linked to pregnancy and childbirth.

Perinatal Depression

sad and low
tearful for no apparent reason
worthless
hopeless about the future
tired
unable to cope
irritable and angry
guilty
hostile or indifferent to your partner or family members
hostile or indifferent to your baby
wanting to run away
having suicidal thoughts

Perinatal Anxiety

tense muscles and headaches
pins and needles
feeling dizzy
faster breathing
thumping or irregular heartbeat
raised blood pressure
difficulty sleeping
experiencing panic attacks
feeling tense, nervous and on edge
fearing the worst
feeling restless
not being able to concentrate
feeling numb

Perinatal OCD

Obsessions

intrusive thoughts about hurting/accidentally hurting your baby
fear of making the wrong decision

Compulsions

constant checking on the baby
mentally going over what happened each day to reassure yourself that you've not been responsible for harming your baby
keeping your baby away from other people in case they hurt them or contaminate them
excessive washing of clothes, toys or bottles

Postpartum Psychosis

excited or elated
severely depressed
rapid mood changes
confused or disorientated
restless
unable to sleep
unable to concentrate
experiencing psychotic symptoms, like delusions or hallucinations

Postpartum PTSD

Re-living aspects of the trauma
Alertness or feeling on edge
Avoiding feelings or memories

GETTING SOME HELP

It's important to know there is help at hand and that you don't need to cope on your own.

There are a range of health professionals who you can talk to about how you're feeling and they can provide you with support in many different ways.

These may include general health and pregnancy support services like:

- ➡ your GP
- ➡ antenatal care (with your midwife or obstetrician)
- ➡ your health visitor
- ➡ voluntary and charity organisations

Asking for help can be difficult when you're having problems with your mental health. It's a good idea to let loved ones know so they can support you.

It is okay to admit you're not perfect and need help.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

family support - a referral to a family support service might be enough to make you feel more able to cope with the stress of parenting.

talking treatments – for example, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or other forms of counselling.

medication – the most common are antidepressants. There are almost 30 different types of antidepressant. They have to be prescribed by a doctor.

a combination of both – many people find that taking medication helps them feel stable enough to get the most out of a talking treatment. However, other people find medication or talking treatments alone are more helpful.

mental health teams – if your condition is severe, you may be referred to a mental health team made up of psychologists, psychiatrists, specialist nurses and occupational therapists.

HOW I CAN LOOK AFTER MYSELF?

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
- ⇒ manage daily tasks
- ⇒ look after yourself



SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

If you're feeling low, make sure that you reach out to your friends and family. It's important to build a strong network of people that can help you when you're struggling. Speak to other mums and dads, share your experiences and you may come to realise that you are not alone and there are people ready to give you emotional and practical support.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR DAY

Be kind to yourself, don't set unrealistic standards and get frustrated. You're doing your best. Coping with household tasks as well as looking after a new baby is challenging. Finding some ways to manage day-to-day can help take the pressure off and help you feel more able to cope with the symptoms of your mental health problem. Set yourself some realistic goals and don't worry if you don't manage them all.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Don't forget to make time for yourself; it's essential for your mental health. Be sure to take time to sleep and make time for you. Think about what really helps you unwind, whether it's reading a book, doing some gardening or doing crafts, do something that makes you feel good.

This centre has a trained Maternal Mental Health Champion you can speak to for more information

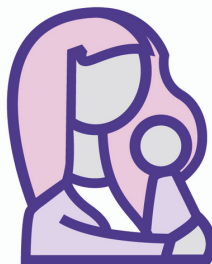


@WomensResourceand
DevelopmentAgency

Women's Resource
and Development
Agency
6 Mount Charles
Belfast
BT7 1NZ



@WRDA_team



The
Mas
Project

Maternal Advocacy and Support

