



# Emotional Health in Pregnancy and After Giving Birth

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## Pregnancy and the first year after giving birth are a significant time in a woman's life.

For some women it can be a very happy and exciting time. Others may have mixed or negative feelings about being pregnant. Some people think that they can't tell others about their negative feelings and may feel that they are unusual or bad to feel down.

These thoughts are much more common than most people realise.

**Around one in seven** women need help with emotional problems during pregnancy and in the first year after a baby is born. **It is believed many other women suffer in silence.**

**Worries about some of the following are common when you are pregnant:**

- Changes in your role (becoming a mother, stopping work)
- Changes in your relationships
- Whether you will be a good parent
- Fear that there will be problems with the pregnancy or the baby
- Fear of childbirth
- Lack of support and being alone

Your partner may have some of the same worries and they may also need to think about asking for help.

## When should I ask for help?

### Signs and symptoms

It is normal to experience **ups and downs** in your mood during pregnancy, and in the year after the baby is born. This may be due to tiredness, physical changes and adapting to the new responsibility of becoming a parent. When this means that you don't look forward to things, or don't enjoy activities as you used to, then it may be time to ask for some help.

**Other signs to look out for are:**

- Being more irritable than usual
- Withdrawing from relationships or activities
- Sleep problems not related to the baby's sleep pattern

- Having no energy
- Worrying excessively
- Thinking that your future is bleak
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, or of ending your life
- Turning to alcohol or other substances to help you to cope
- Close family or friends saying they are concerned about you
- Unusual thoughts that don't make sense to you

Asking for help to improve your emotional wellbeing at this time can be an important step towards becoming the parent you want to be.

### **Some ways you can help yourself are:**

- Take a few minutes every day to do something you enjoy and make a longer period of time each week for an enjoyable activity
- Do some physical activity which makes you a bit out of breath, for example a brisk walk
- Find ways to meet other new mums, for example through your local Children's Centre

## **What help is available for emotional problems during pregnancy?**

The help which is most appropriate for you will depend on the type and severity of the distress you experience. You can get support and advice about how to look after your emotional health from your midwife, health visitor or GP.

For some women, psychological therapies can help. For others medication or a combination of medication and psychological therapy may be most helpful.

### **Psychological therapies**

Most NHS psychological therapy services will see you more quickly if you are pregnant or have given birth in the past year. Talking to a trained therapist can help you to come to terms with some of the changes you may be finding difficult. A therapist can help you to identify small changes you can make to what you are doing or thinking to improve your emotional health.

## Medication

If you are taking medication for depression, anxiety or other mental health difficulties, you should ideally talk to your doctor 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.

It is important that you don't stop your medication suddenly, unless told to by your doctor. Stopping treatment suddenly can cause people to relapse more quickly. It can also cause side effects. It may be best for you to continue your medication during your pregnancy.



## What if I have had serious mental health problems in the past, but am feeling well now?

You should discuss this with your GP as you may be referred to a mental health service if you are pregnant and have ever had:

- Serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder or severe depression, a serious eating disorder
- Treatment from a psychiatrist
- Previous postpartum psychosis or severe postnatal depression

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 you make a plan for how to look after your mental health as your pregnancy progresses and when your baby is born.

## **Children and Families' Social Services**

Parents often worry that telling a health professional that they are feeling low, anxious, emotionally unstable, or have suffered from a mental illness, will lead to them being judged as bad parents. For most people the opposite is true. If professionals know about an emotional or mental health difficulty they will be in a better position to help you to be the parent you want to be.

**The support of family, partners and friends is very important for pregnant women and new mothers. If you know someone who is struggling, encourage them to seek help when they need to.**

## **Bonding Issues**

Every parent wants to do the best for their baby, but sometimes there are pressures that put a strain on the relationship and make it hard to 'bond' or emotionally connect to your baby.

These might include:

- Struggling with how you feel about being a mum or dad
- Your birth experience was very difficult
- Your baby is fretful or struggles to eat or sleep
- Your own early life experiences
- You may be experiencing specific mental health difficulties

Whether you are a first time parent or not, all of these things might affect the relationship between you and your baby, which might be helped with early intervention, and speaking with your midwife, health visitor, GP or mental health professional in the first instance.

You can be referred to our Infant Mental Health service if more specialist help is required.

**Having a baby may not be the happy time you were expecting. Many pregnant women or new parents need advice and support if they are feeling low. It is important to seek help when you need it.**

**You can speak to:**

- Your GP, midwife or health visitor
- The free NHS Let's Talk service on  **0800 073 2200**
- Your local Children's Centre  
([www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/article/110061/Childrens-Centres](http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/article/110061/Childrens-Centres))
- The Samaritans on  **116 123**

**Or visit:** 

[www.talk2gether.nhs.uk](http://www.talk2gether.nhs.uk)

[www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk)

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

[www.pandasfoundation.org.uk](http://www.pandasfoundation.org.uk)

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

[www.time-to-change.org.uk](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk)

[www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk)

[www.turning-point.co.uk](http://www.turning-point.co.uk)

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

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