



Emotional health in pregnancy

Having a baby is both an exciting and challenging time. Adding anxiety or depression can make it difficult to function and feel like you are a good enough parent. Both women and men can experience perinatal (during pregnancy and the year after birth) mental health issues and these can vary in intensity and symptoms.

Antenatal Anxiety & Depression

When anxiety or depression occurs during pregnancy it is referred to as antenatal anxiety or antenatal depression. Up to 1 in 10 women and 1 in 20 men experience antenatal depression. Anxiety is just as common, and many parents' experience anxiety and depression at the same time.

It is normal to experience a degree of anxiety and 'ups and downs' when expecting a baby. However, some people develop a more pronounced anxiety or lower mood (depression) which affects their daily life and functioning.

There are treatments, supports and services available to help you through this experience. If symptoms last for more than two weeks, it's time to seek support. The signs and symptoms of antenatal anxiety and depression can vary and may include:

- Panic attacks (a racing heart, palpitations, shortness of breath, shaking or feeling physically 'detached' from your surroundings)
- Persistent, generalised worry, often focused on fears for the health or wellbeing of the baby
- The development of obsessive or compulsive behaviours
- Abrupt mood swings
- Feeling constantly sad, low, or crying for no obvious reason • Being nervous, 'on edge', or panicky
- Feeling constantly tired and lacking energy
- Having little or no interest in all the normal things that bring joy (like time with friends, exercise, eating, or sharing partner time)
- Sleeping too much or not sleeping very well at all
- Losing interest in sex or intimacy
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Being easily annoyed or irritated
- Finding it difficult to focus, concentrate or remember (people with depression often describe this as a 'brain fog')



- Engaging in more risk-taking behaviour (e.g., alcohol or drug use)
- Having thoughts of death or suicide

Postnatal Anxiety & Depression

When anxiety or depression begins in the year after birth, it is referred to as postnatal anxiety or postnatal depression. More than 1 in 7 new mums and up to 1 in 10 new dads experience postnatal depression each year in Australia.

Postnatal anxiety is just as common, and many parents' experience anxiety and depression at the same time. Postnatal anxiety and depression can be a frightening and isolating experience as parents try to deal with their symptoms at the same time as needing to care for a new baby. There are treatments, supports and services available to help you through this experience. If symptoms last for more than two weeks, it's time to seek support.

Postnatal Psychosis is a rare but serious condition; it occurs soon after birth. Treatment includes support and specialist hospitalisation. The good news is women generally experience a full recovery with time and appropriate treatment.

Factors that Contribute to Perinatal Anxiety & Depression

There are several factors that can contribute to developing perinatal anxiety and depression. These include: • History of anxiety and depression • Family history of mental illness • Previous reproductive loss (infertility, IVF, miscarriage, termination, stillbirth, death of baby) • Difficult or complex pregnancy • Birth trauma • Premature or sick baby • Challenges with feeding or settling • Sleep deprivation • Pre-existing physical illnesses • Financial stress • Relationship stress

Getting Help for a Perinatal Mental Health Issue

If you're concerned about what is happening to you, you can:

- Confide in your partner, a trusted friend or family member
- Let your GP or other trusted health professional know what you're experiencing
- Talk to other parents who have recovered from perinatal anxiety or depression
- Call the PANDA Helpline to talk about your thoughts and feelings and explore options for support.

If you are worried about someone close to you, you can: • Gently ask if they are able or willing to share what is going on • Reassure them that they are not alone. There are things that can be done to help • Suggest that they speak to their GP, other trusted health professional or PANDA •

Phone PANDA for further guidance on how best to support them. If you're worried you could have antenatal or postnatal anxiety or depression, be assured that many other women and men



INTUITION
PRIVATE OBSTETRICS & GYNAECOLOGY

GYNAECOLOGY
MENOPAUSE
FERTILITY

OBSTETRICS
ULTRASOUND & FETAL MEDICINE
PAEDIATRICS

have come through this experience to find joy and fulfillment as a parent. You are not alone, and you don't have to go through it alone.

Reference PANDA Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia

PANDA National Helpline 1300 726 306 M-F 9am -7.30pm AEST/AEDT

panda.org.au

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