

Having a baby can increase the risk

It's normal for new mothers to experience a brief low mood shortly after the birth of a baby. This is referred to as "the baby blues". Depression is different because it lasts much longer.

Depression affects up to 15% of mothers after they have given birth (postnatal), and up to 9% of women during pregnancy (antenatal).

- It can range from mild to severe depression, and can occur any time during pregnancy or after the baby is born (up to one year later).
- Postnatal depression can occur after pregnancies of any length, including those where there is a miscarriage.
- Symptoms of postnatal depression usually start within the first few months after delivery. The mother may not seem interested in her baby, or other members of her family, or may experience difficulties doing everyday tasks that once were achievable.

Fathers can also experience depression at this time, especially if their partner is depressed, although for men it's often not recognized and is not usually referred to as "postnatal depression".

If you want to talk to someone who can help:

Call Healthline including the Well Child line
0800 611 116.

Call Plunketline on **0800 933 922**

Call the Depression Helpline on **0800 111 757**

Text The Lowdown team for free on **5626**

Or talk to your doctor

+ the warning signs

Symptoms of postnatal depression are similar to depression at other times. The symptoms can range from mild to severe.

The mother will probably have the usual depression signs of feeling sad most of the time or having lost interest in things that were once enjoyable. Other symptoms might include:

- Feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness.
- Feeling so unhappy that eating and sleeping patterns change.
- Blaming yourself unnecessarily when things go wrong.
- Feeling anxious, panicky or overwhelmed.
- Having thoughts of suicide.

As well, she may be emotionally detached from her baby and other family members.

+ what can cause postnatal depression?

Just like depression at other times, there is no single cause of postnatal depression. Experiencing depression at some time in the past, particularly during the pregnancy, is the single biggest risk factor for postnatal depression.

But this doesn't mean that people with a personal history of depression will always develop postnatal depression.

Other key characteristics linked with a higher risk of developing postnatal depression include:

- Past or current mental illness or emotional problems (including depression during pregnancy).
- Family history of depression.
- Being younger than 20 years old at time of delivery.
- Being unmarried.
- Having been separated from one or both parents in childhood or adolescence.
- Receiving poor parental support in childhood.
- Poor social support from friends and family.
- Poor relationship with husband or boyfriend.
- Economic problems with housing or income.
- Dissatisfaction with amount of education.
- Low self-esteem.

+ what you can do

Psychological treatment or talking therapy is generally the most effective way of treating depression during pregnancy and in the post-natal period. It may also have the added benefit of helping to increase the social support available to the woman. Medication can also play an important role.

Recent studies have found that the group of medications known as "SSRIs" (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibiter) are effective in treating postnatal depression. These antidepressants have fewer side effects than other antidepressants and can be taken by breast-feeding mothers. The decision to take medication is up to the individual and should be made in consultation with a doctor. See Fact Sheet 16 for Treatment Options.

+ getting help

Talk to your doctor, midwife or Well Child provider (eg, Plunket nurse) about your options if you are worried about postnatal depression. It is important to ask for help. If your request isn't heard, ask again, or try and find someone who will listen.

**Call Healthline (incl the Well Child line) 0800 611 116.
Call Plunketline on 0800 933 922.**

If you want to talk to a trained counsellor about how you're feeling, or you've got any questions, you can:

- **Call the Depression Helpline on 0800 111 757**
- **Text The Lowdown team for free on 5626**

They can listen to your story, and come up with ideas about what might help. They can also put you in touch with health professionals close to where you live, if that's what you want.

Or for more information you can visit:

**www.depression.org.nz, www.thelowdown.co.nz
or www.mothersmatter.co.nz**

The Ministry of Health would like to acknowledge information sourced from: NZ Mental Health Survey 2006, NZ Guidelines Group, Royal Australian and NZ College of Psychiatrists, MaGPIe Research Group, Beyond Blue (Australia).