

COMING HOME FROM A MOTHER AND BABY UNIT: COPING IN THE FIRST WEEKS

Mother and Baby Units are specialist in-patient psychiatric units that have been established to provide care for mothers together with their babies. This focuses on the mother-baby relationship as an important part of treatment while minimising disruption.

Leaving the safety of hospital or a Mother and Baby Unit and returning to the place where life was difficult can be very stressful. The hospital staff will work with you during your hospital stay to link you up with community support services to help your ongoing recovery when you go home. PANDA can also provide you with telephone support and assistance to build a local support network.

Additional strategies to make transitions easier:

1. Accept that recovery takes time. Like recovery from any major physical illness, it can take months or even years to recover fully from depression. Expecting too much of yourself too soon may increase your anxiety. Scale down your activities and resume them gradually as you feel able to. Don't attempt to do things before you are ready, just because you think you should be able to.
2. Maintain your treatment. By the time you go home you and your doctor will have established the treatment you need for your ongoing recovery. Continue to see your doctor, counsellor or support group. Contact PANDA if you need to set up these supports.
3. Let the housework go for a while. Stick to the basics of caring for yourself and your family initially. Employing a cleaner, maybe once a fortnight for a few months, or enlisting family and friends can be very important. Remember that even if the house is disorganised, it will eventually be back in order.
4. Ask for help when you need it: Most people will be glad to help. If people offer to help be clear about what you need. Preparing meals, hanging out the washing, babysitting and shopping are some of the things others may easily do for you. Explain that you need ongoing support for some time but this need will change over time.
5. Make changes to your family's routine to accommodate your needs: Often relatively small changes can make it easier to cope. For example the hours from 5.00 to 7.00 in the evening can be the most difficult with a crying baby and cranky toddler to feed and bath. Perhaps your partner can alter his work hours in order to be home at the time? If not, ask a friend or family member to come over for an hour or two. Knowing that you have some support in the evening can make the day easier to cope with.
6. Surround yourself with people who understand how you feel. Have a list of people you can call or visit if you need to talk. Join a support group or talk to someone who has experienced depression and recovered. PANDA's Helpline can provide a listening ear and some support on a bad day or whenever you need to talk. PANDA can also help you locate a support group in your area.



Additional strategies to make transitions easier (continued):

7. Make some time just for yourself, everyday. We all need it, especially when we feel overwhelmed by the demands of babies and young children. Ask your partner or a friend to mind the baby while you take half an hour to listen to a relaxation tape, go for a walk or read a book. Make this time a priority over the housework and the endless list of things that need to be done.
8. Make a crisis card. This is a list of things to do and people to call if you find yourself needing help. It may have details of people or services to call, such as ring PANDA or the Mother and Baby Unit, or call family members to come over. Knowing that you have a list of things to do in an emergency can be reassuring.

As you leave hospital, remember that the road to recovery is rarely smooth. There will be times when you think you are not making progress. Most women recover from postnatal depression, although sometimes it takes longer than we expect. With support and time, you will soon be enjoying your baby and your life again.

Fact sheet written by Dr Deborah Gleeson MPH PhD



PANDA

Contact us 810 Nicholson St, North Fitzroy, VIC, 3068 www.panda.org.au
Support 1300 726 306 Admin 03 9481 3377 Fax 03 9482 6210 Email info@panda.org.au