

While pregnancy and the first year of parenthood (the perinatal period) is often exciting, it is also a challenging time that brings many changes. It's normal for parents to experience some 'ups and downs' as they adjust. For some however, these challenges become overwhelming and impact on their ability to enjoy daily life.

Over 100,000 women and men experience perinatal anxiety or depression each year in Australia. It can be a frightening and isolating experience for parents; and guilt and shame can get in the way of asking for help. If this is how you feel, know that you are not alone and you are not a 'bad parent'. Help is available and getting support early leads to a faster recovery. Seek help if you have symptoms for two weeks or more.

Antenatal anxiety and depression

Up to 1 in 10 women and 1 in 20 men experience antenatal (during pregnancy) depression. Antenatal anxiety is just as common, and many parents experience antenatal anxiety and depression at the same time. Left untreated, parents are more at risk of developing **postnatal anxiety or depression**, so it's important to get support as soon as possible.

Baby blues

It is not uncommon for women to experience the 'baby blues' in the first few days after birth. The symptoms can include teariness, anxiety or irritability and these usually resolve in a few days with understanding, acknowledgment and support.

Postnatal psychosis

Postnatal psychosis* is an uncommon but serious illness that affects 1 or 2 in every 1,000 women and can put both mother and baby at risk. It almost always requires hospital admission. The symptoms are generally sudden and can include extreme mood swings, significant behaviour changes and loss of touch with reality.

*Also known as puerperal or postpartum psychosis.

Postnatal anxiety and depression

When anxiety or depression begins in the year after birth, it is known as postnatal anxiety or depression. More than 1 in 7 new mums and up to 1 in 10 new dads struggle with postnatal depression each year; and anxiety is just as common. Fortunately there are treatments, supports and self-care activities to help parents through this experience.

Contributing factors

A range of physical, psychological and social factors can contribute to developing perinatal anxiety and depression. These may 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 or birth (trauma)
- Premature or sick baby
- Challenges with feeding or settling
- Sleep deprivation
- Pre-existing physical illnesses
- Financial stress
- Relationship stress
- Family violence
- Lack of social support
- History of childhood trauma or neglect
- Isolation and lack of social connections
- Loss and grief issues
- Absence of your own mother/mothering figure.

What treatments are available?

Recovery can involve more than one approach and it's best to discuss options with your GP, another trusted health professional or PANDA. There are a range of treatment options including medication approved for use during pregnancy and breastfeeding, counselling, social support, speaking with someone who has been through a similar experience (peer support), exercise and a healthy diet.

Many other parents have come through this experience to find joy and fulfilment as a parent. You're not alone, and you don't have to go through it alone.

Asking for help

Asking for help is the first and most difficult step. Remember that seeking help early leads to a faster recovery with less impact on you and your family. If you are concerned, you can:

- Call the PANDA National Helpline
- Confide in your partner, a friend or family member
- Talk to your GP or another trusted health professional.

Partners and carers need help too

Caring for someone with perinatal anxiety or depression can be confusing and stressful. It's important to look after your own wellbeing. Parents are more at risk of developing perinatal anxiety and depression themselves if their partner has experienced it. Looking after your own health will also help you be the best support for others. PANDA's Helpline is available for partners and carers too.

'It helped so much to talk to people who understood what I was going through.'

Signs and symptoms

The signs and symptoms of perinatal anxiety and depression can vary, so it's important to know what to look out for. Symptoms may include:

- Feeling sad, low, or crying for no obvious reason
- Persistent, generalised worry, often focused on fears for the health or wellbeing of your baby
- Being nervous, 'on edge', or panicky
- Being easily annoyed or irritated
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Sleeping too much or not sleeping well at all
- Abrupt mood swings
- Feeling constantly tired and lacking energy
- Having little or no interest in the things that normally bring you joy (time with friends or family, exercise, eating)
- Fear of being alone or with others
- Finding it difficult to focus, concentrate or remember ("brain fog")
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Panic attacks (racing heart, palpitations, shortness of breath, shaking or feeling physically 'detached' from your surroundings)
- Developing obsessive or compulsive behaviours
- Thoughts of death, suicide or harming your baby.

If you or someone close to you has experienced symptoms for two weeks or more, please seek support.

How PANDA can help

We provide confidential Australia-wide counselling, support, information and referrals to local services for anyone affected by perinatal (during pregnancy and after birth) depression and anxiety.

PANDA's support includes:

- Professional counselling
- Peer support from parents who have experienced perinatal anxiety or depression
- Information resources
- Help setting up support groups/supported playgroups
- Community and health professional education.



PANDA National Helpline
1300 726 306



panda.org.au
howisdadgoing.org.au



PANDAadmin



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Please help PANDA to continue to support families with perinatal anxiety and depression. Donate online at panda.org.au. Thank you

Is pregnancy or early parenthood making you sad or anxious?

PANDA National Helpline

1300 726 306

Mon – Fri 9am – 7.30pm AEST/AEDT

panda.org.au



PANDA
Perinatal Anxiety &
Depression Australia