Pregnancy, parenthood and mental health

Information for patients
Pregnancy, parenthood and mental health

If you, your partner or a loved one is pregnant or considering becoming pregnant, you might have concerns about how it will affect your mental health. Pregnancy and the first year of your child’s life can be a wonderful but potentially stressful time and **more than 1 in 10 women and 3 in 10 dads** experience some type of mental health problem during this period.

It’s important to know there is help and support available from a range of health professionals, regardless of whether you’ve experienced mental health difficulties before or not.

Looking after your mental health and wellbeing helps ensure your baby has the best possible start in life.

This leaflet contains information for anyone concerned about potential impacts of mental health problems during or immediately after pregnancy including for pregnant women and their loved ones.

**Contents**

- How can pregnancy affect my mental health?
- What treatment is available?
- Support for dads and loved ones
- Further support
How can pregnancy affect my mental health?

Many women experience good mental health during their pregnancy. However, for some people, pregnancy can make an existing mental health condition more severe or difficult to manage or can cause a condition that affected them previously to resurface. Others have mental health problems for the first time in pregnancy.

**Depression and anxiety** are the most common mental health problems in pregnancy. These affect about 10 to 15 out of every 100 pregnant women. Women also experience many other mental health problems during pregnancy, just like at other times.

How your mental health is affected during pregnancy depends on many things. These include:

- the type of mental illness you may have experienced
- whether you are on treatment
- other recent stressful events in your life
- how you feel about your pregnancy

Symptoms of mental illness in pregnancy are similar to symptoms you would have at other times. Some symptoms might focus on the pregnancy. For instance, you may have anxious or negative thoughts about your pregnancy or your baby.

Sometimes pregnancy-related symptoms can be confused with symptoms of mental illness. For example, broken sleep and lack of energy are common in both pregnancy and depression.
What if I have had mental health problems in the past, but am well now?

You should be referred to a mental health service if you are pregnant and have ever had:

- a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder or severe depression
- treatment from mental health services
- postpartum psychosis or severe postnatal depression
- a severe anxiety disorder such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- an eating disorder, such as anorexia or bulimia

It is important to get specialist advice even if you are well during this pregnancy. Women who have had these illnesses have a higher risk of becoming unwell after childbirth. Mental health professionals will discuss care and treatment choices with you. They will help you make a plan for your care, with your midwife, obstetrician, health visitor and GP.

Talk to your GP if you have had any other mental health problems. Often your GP will be able to advise about care and treatment.
What treatment is available?

The best treatment for you will depend on the type and severity of illness you have experienced. Both medication and psychological therapies (talking treatments) can help.

**Medication**

It is important to discuss medication with your GP or psychiatrist. They will give you the information you need to help you decide what is best for you and your baby.

If you are already on medication, you should talk to your doctor before you become pregnant, if possible. If your pregnancy is unplanned, you should see your doctor as soon as you know you are pregnant. It is very important that you don’t stop your medication suddenly, unless your doctor tells you to. Stopping treatment suddenly can cause people to relapse more quickly. It can also cause side-effects.

Some medications have been used in pregnancy for many years. A few medications are known to cause problems in some babies if taken in pregnancy.

Your doctor can help you to think carefully about the advantages and disadvantages of choosing a particular medication.
Psychological therapies

A talking treatment may be helpful for your mental health problem. For some women this can be used instead of medication. Others may need a talking treatment as well as medication.

Some psychological therapies services will see you more quickly if you are pregnant. Your doctor can advise you about referral in your local area.

In Bury, Oldham, Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale, Stockport and Tameside and Glossop, talking therapies are provided by Healthy Minds.

You can find out more at www.penninecare.nhs.uk/healthyminds

In Trafford, visit www.gmw.nhs.uk/tpt for details.

Professionals involved in your care

A number of services and professionals offer help and support during pregnancy.

Maternity services

Your midwife will ask questions about your physical and mental health. You should tell your midwife if you have had mental health problems. She can ensure you get the care and support you need. It is important that you attend your antenatal appointments during pregnancy.

Your GP

You should talk to your GP if you are worried about mental health problems in pregnancy. Your GP can provide information, advice and treatment. He/she can refer you to a mental health or psychological therapies service if needed.
Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) and Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services

If you are already under the care of a CMHT, you should tell your care co-ordinator that you are pregnant. She/he can tell you about treatment and support available for pregnant women, and new mothers, in your area.

If you are not under the care of a CMHT, but have been in the past, you should talk to your GP. You may need the support of the CMHT during pregnancy and for a few months after birth.

Children and families social services

In some cases your doctor, midwife or another professional may want to refer you to Children and Families Social Services.

Social workers from Children and Families Social Services focus on children’s wellbeing. They provide a range of care and support for children and families. This depends on the needs of the child and other family members.

Your health visitor

Health visitors see all women with new babies. They offer advice and help about the baby’s health, feeding, sleep and other issues. In some areas health visitors may see you even before your baby is born.
Pre-birth planning meetings

There are usually several professionals involved in your care during pregnancy. They need to work together with you and your family to make sure you have the care and support you need.

If you have had a severe mental illness, it is helpful to have a meeting to plan your care during pregnancy. This meeting will include you, your partner and all the professionals involved in your care. You may also want to bring other close family members or friends.

The meeting helps everyone agree a plan for your care during pregnancy, delivery, and for the first few months after birth. This plan will be written down and you should have a copy.

What else can I do to maintain my mental wellbeing during pregnancy?

• Eat a healthy, balanced diet.

• Do not drink alcohol.

• Stop smoking (ask your midwife or GP about 'stop smoking' services).

• Find some time each week to do something which you enjoy and relax.

• Let family and friends help you with housework, shopping etc.

• Exercise (ask your midwife about exercise in pregnancy and local exercise classes).

• Discuss any worries you may have with your family, your midwife or GP.

• Get regular sleep.
Support for dads and loved ones

It’s important to remember that it’s not just mothers who need mental health support before or after the birth of a child. Dads, other partners or loved ones may also experience stress, depression, anxiety or other mental health problems.

Up to three in 10 dads suffer from mental health problems and the figure is significantly higher for those supporting a partner with post-natal depression or other mental health difficulties.

Some of the signs you might be experiencing a mental health problem include:

- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Feeling anxious or worried
- Feeling tired or run down
- Sleep problems
- Loss of interest in sex
- Lack of confidence
- Feeling irritable
- Feeling detached

Remember it’s ok to ask for help. In fact, looking after your mental health can help you to support your partner or loved one and your baby.

Some of the things you can do to look after your mental health include:

- Spending time with your baby, having skin contact, bathing them or taking them out
• Talking about your feelings rather than bottling them up. This could be to a health professional or family member

• Eating healthy and exercising

You can find more information and help at www.fatherhoodinstitute.org, or www.reachingoutpmh.co.uk

Support is also available from your GP or health professional.

Where can I get further information and help?

**National Childbirth Trust**
**Helpline:** 0300 330 0772. Advice, support and counselling on all aspects of childbirth and early parenthood.

**Netmums**
A website offering support and information on pregnancy and parenting. There is a specific section of the website offering support. There is also information on local resources and support groups.

**The Association for Postnatal Illness (APNI) Tel:** 020 7386 0868
Telephone helpline and information leaflets for women with postnatal mental illness. Also a network of volunteers (telephone and postal), who have themselves experienced postnatal mental illness.

**Family Action Tel:** 020 7254 6251
Support and practical help for families affected by mental illness. Includes ‘Newpin’ services – offering support to parents of children under 5 whose mental health is affecting their ability to provide safe parenting.

**Drinkaware:** Check the facts about alcohol and pregnancy.

**Samaritans**
**Helpline:** 08457 90 90 90  
**Email:** jo@samaritans.org.
National organisation offering support to those in distress who feel suicidal or despairing and need someone to talk to.
Patient Advice and Liaison Service

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) acts on behalf of service users, families and carers to negotiate prompt solutions and help bring about changes in the way that services are developed. As well as providing a confidential advice and support service, PALS will help guide you through the different services available from the NHS.

Tel: 0161 716 3178

Comments and complaints

We want to learn from comments and complaints about our services. If you have any, please speak with a member of staff. Every effort will be made to resolve any concerns and complaining will not cause any difficulties in your care with us.

You can also contact the Trust’s Complaints Department via post at Trust Headquarters, 225 Old Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, OL6 7SR.

Tel: 0161 716 3083
Email: complaints.penninecare@nhs.net

Become a member of our Trust

You can be the voice of your community by electing or becoming a governor, find out more about your local mental health and community services, and receive updates, comment on our plans and get invitations to health events.

Tel: 0161 716 3960
Email: ftmembership.penninecare@nhs.net

Alternative formats

If you need help to understand this information, require it in another format such as large print, spoken (on CD) or Braille, or require it in a different language – speak to a member of staff.