



## **POSTNATAL DEPRESSION IN DADS**

Postnatal depression is not limited to women following childbirth, some men experience it too and this is known as *Paternal Postnatal Depression*. In the first two months after birth it is thought that up to a quarter of men may experience symptoms of depression. Many things can affect how likely this is to happen such as stress, biological factors, lack of support or being excluded from the new relationship between the mother and the baby. Other factors include a change to your role, previous emotional difficulties, lack of sleep and living with a partner who is depressed.

### **Symptoms of Paternal Postnatal Depression**

It is thought that the symptoms of Paternal PND are similar to maternal PND and can include:

*Changes in your emotions or feelings:* such as feeling sad, anxious, disconnected, guilty, inadequate, alone, unable to cope, feelings of anger, frustration or irritability.

*Changes in your thoughts:* losing confidence, worrying about death, irrational or negative thoughts

*Changes in your body:* poor sleep, changes in appetite, tearfulness, poor concentration

*Changes in your behaviour:* finding it difficult to do even the simplest of things, cutting yourself off, finding it hard to bond with your baby, being inactive for long periods of time, becoming quite obsessive about certain routines.

It is important to note that not everyone who is depressed has all of these symptoms. However, if you experience several of the symptoms listed above and these are not getting better over time, then you may be suffering from depression. Paternal PND does not always happen straight after your child is born. It may take longer to develop than maternal PND. It is important that you take steps to help yourself and/or seek help from others.

### **What can be done if you have Paternal PND?**

If you are struggling following the birth of your baby then it is very important to tell your GP about how you are feeling. You may decide you need more support and want to be referred to a therapist which your GP will be able to arrange for you. Treating your depression will help you feel happier and more settled in your new role as a father. Anti-depressant medication may be an option to consider. They can help ease the symptoms of moderate or severe PND and give you some breathing space to adjust to all the changes involved in becoming a father.

Aside from your doctor, there are also things you can do to help yourself. The following are helpful advice and activities which might help:

*Talk to your partner.* We know that a lack of social support contributes to depression. It is important to try and let your partner know how you feel. This will help them to be more supporting and comforting as it will help them understand why you may have been acting differently. Parenting is tough and couples that can help each other will be in a stronger position.

*Talk to other fathers.* It may help to meet other new dads. Dads groups are becoming more and more common as a place for them to share their thoughts and experiences of becoming a parent with their peers. Check your local NCT branch or family information service for groups or go online. Some useful websites for fathers are: [www.dad.info](http://www.dad.info) [www.fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org) [www.dadsmatteruk.org](http://www.dadsmatteruk.org) and [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com) who have a section on male pnd.

*Do something active.* Take some exercise every day, like a walk with the buggy or other exercise that you used to enjoy. Any kind of activity that increases your heart rate will have a positive effect on your mood.

*Be involved:* However you are feeling, you are very important to your baby. It's the little things that help you and your baby build a relationship, such as holding and talking to your baby, bathing and changing nappies.

*Look after yourself:* Eat well and aim for 3 balanced meals a day. Avoid negative coping strategies such as drinking too much or working too hard. Try to keep in touch with your friends (even if it is less frequent) and find ways to keep up your hobbies and interests as much you as you can.

Recognising you might be experiencing PND and seeking help can be hard but it is the first step towards feeling better. No new parent should be embarrassed about seeking help or feel they can't talk about it. Recovery from PND is gradual but you will make a full recovery with the right help and support.

**Further information:**

For more information about paternal postnatal depression contact us at:

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The National Childbirth Trust  
Phone: 0300 330 0700  
Website: [www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk)  
or

Netmums  
Website: [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com)