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For further copies of this booklet please contact the Public Health Improvement Information Team
Tel: 283 1124 / 283 1125 / 283 1126
Email: healthinfo@sotw.nhs.uk

This information can be made available in another format or language on request.
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Where can I get more information?

For more information about postnatal depression, write to the address below enclosing a stamped, addressed envelope:

The Association for Postnatal Illness
7 Gowan Avenue
Fulham
LONDON
SW6 6RH

Tel:  (0207) 386 0868

The Association is also always pleased to hear from mothers who have recovered from postnatal depression and who would like to help mothers suffering from the condition.

If you would like to join a group meeting where all the problems of motherhood are discussed, please write to:

The National Childbirth Trust
Alexandra House
Oldham Terrace
Acton
LONDON
W3 6NH

Tel:  (0870) 444 8707
Introduction

Parenthood can be a joyous and special occasion, however the reality can be very different at times. How little we know about what to expect as a new parent!

This booklet will give you information, help, support and coping skills. It contains:

- General information and advice on coping with the emotional demands of parenthood
- Information about postnatal depression
- A directory of services which are available to parents
- Self-help hints for you and your baby

If there is anything which is not clear, or you require more information, please feel free to talk to your Health Visitor.

Parenthood is a finely balanced juggling act. We hope this booklet will help you.

Who can you turn to when the going gets tough?

Help is available in many forms which may include the following:

- Another mother who has experienced postnatal depression or distress, because they have been there and can be a great source of support to a mother who has suffered from postnatal depression
- Your Health Visitor
- A contact for further support and counselling can be arranged through your Health Visitor or GP
Help hints for baby

- If your baby is still young enough, invest in a baby sling - many babies are soothed by the closeness and will sleep
- Taking your baby for a walk in the pram will make a welcome change from the same four walls. The gentle rocking sensation will often calm an irritable baby
- Play with your baby. Most babies respond well to being played with. Look them in the eye, talk to baby and let him/her ‘talk’ back
- Give your baby a massage. Warm some baby oil in your hands and rub it gently onto your baby’s body and limbs
- Beware of well meaning ‘advisers’. Some people will tell you picking up a baby every time it cries will ‘spoil’ it. It will not. Responding to the needs of a baby is not spoiling - it is good parenting

If you are worrying about a friend’s baby crawling, walking, or talking before your baby - please remember that every child is unique and will develop at his/her own pace.

Becoming a parent

Coping with worries

As a new mother, when baby is sleeping it’s very tempting to catch up on the ironing, housework or prepare the evening meal, but it is important that you have plenty of rest especially in the early days. Your body has been through tremendous changes and needs time to recover with the right food, rest and relaxation.

Talking with partners, parents, family and friends is very important, but you may sometimes need some extra help. Why not talk to your Health Visitor, they are there for you, as well as the baby, and are interested in your emotional health as well as your physical well-being.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help or to accept it when it is offered. Your needs are just as important as everyone else’s.

Child development is not a race, parenthood is not a competition. Be strong and do what feels right for you.
New feelings

- Some new mothers may find it hard at first to feel love for their baby.
- Sometimes it takes several months for these feelings to develop.
- Some mothers may believe that if their baby wasn’t there, then their life would be normal again. This may result in feelings of guilt and resentment.

Fortunately for most, these feelings disappear and mothers learn to love and relate to their new baby. But what if those feelings don’t disappear?

Self help hints

- The responsibilities of being a mother are learned — get help and advice.
- Try to make friends with other people who are experienced with young children.
- Don’t overload yourself with extra, less important tasks.
- Get plenty of rest and sleep.
- Talk to your partner, family and experienced friends and discuss your plans and worries.
- Don’t give up your outside interests, but cut down the responsibilities and rearrange your schedules.
- Ask for, and accept, all the help you can get from friends, family, neighbours etc. Do it without guilt.
Blame and rejection

Some mothers blame and reject others for the way they feel. They blame them for, amongst other things:

- A lack of support and understanding
- The trauma of the birth
- Feeling alone
- The baby being the wrong sex

This can be due to:

- The realisation that life will never be the same again
- The sheer workload

Mothers faced with this can feel overburdened and undervalued.

The baby blues

What are the baby blues?

The baby blues are a period of feeling more sensitive or fragile which can occur soon after the baby is born. About half of all mothers go through a patch of the blues, lasting no longer than a few days.

What causes the baby blues?

The baby blues can have a number of possible causes:

- Changes in your hormone levels around the time of your baby’s birth
- Tiredness after the birth, combined with all the stress leading up to it. You will probably need lots of rest to get your strength back
- New things to deal with such as jaundice and feeding problems, which will settle down as your baby grows
How will I feel if I get the blues?

Some mothers can appear cheerful while actually feeling depressed, however everyone is different. Some of the things mothers have felt are:

- Very emotional and upset, bursting into tears for no particular reason
- Tense and anxious, worrying about everything and often having trouble sleeping
- Unwell, very tired or having a pain which seems to have no cause

What is the difference between the baby blues and postnatal depression?

The baby blues are quite common and occur during the first week after a baby's birth and only last for a short while, whereas postnatal depression is a distressing condition which affects one in ten of mothers. The depression usually starts after the mother has left hospital.

There are many symptoms of postnatal depression including: deep dejection, tearfulness, feeling that you can't cope with the baby, fears for your own and the baby's health, tension, irritability, feeling exhausted, pain, poor appetite, difficulty in sleeping, loss of interest in sex.
Depressive symptoms can range from a low sad feeling to an intense almost paralysing despair.

The following feelings are just some of the feelings you may have. There may be many more:

- You may feel as though you are in a long dark tunnel with no way out. At times like this suicidal feelings are common - but rarely attempted
- You may feel numb, empty and at a loss
- You may think negative thoughts and dwell on failures
- You may have a sense of hopelessness and worry over trivial matters
- You may feel irritable and frustrated
- You may also feel unsociable

Postnatal depression

This means depression occurring in the first year of your baby’s life. It usually starts in the first month after the birth but for some women, postnatal depression can start up to six months later.

Although postnatal depression is recognised in about one in every ten women, a lot more probably suffer in silence. Postnatal depression can happen to anyone and is not a sign of weakness. It is no-one’s fault.

Sometimes there seems to be a clear reason, for example a sick baby, financial problems, a change in family circumstances or a bereavement, but often there is no obvious cause.

All these feelings and sensations are very common. You are not alone, and can get the help and support you need.
Signs and symptoms

The signs and symptoms are many and varied and are experienced in different combinations by different women after childbirth.

There may be changes in your mood such as:

- Feeling unhappy and low
- Bursting into tears easily or not being able to cry
- Feeling like you can’t cope
- Feelings of guilt or failure as mothers and partners

Sometimes with depression you may also have anxiety and experience some of the following:

- Tension and stress
- Feeling too worried to go outside of the home
- Frightened of being left alone
- Feeling dizzy, sweaty and sick

Physically, you may find that you:

- Have difficulty in getting to sleep or waking early
- Are always tired and not getting enough rest
- Are eating less or more than usual
- Have a lack of interest in sex which can last for some time

These feelings may appear irrational to others. But to you they are perfectly justified. With the right support, and the appropriate treatments, there is an excellent chance of you returning to a happy self.