



## MOTHERHOOD CAN MAKE YOU SAD

When couples decide to have a baby they picture a beautiful baby, fulfillment and joy. They may also picture a crying baby, nappies, and sleepless nights. Not many couples consider having a baby will bring sadness and even depression. For around 15-20% of new mothers postnatal depression becomes an overwhelming and powerful influence over their lives and their family. Sometimes women who are pregnant can also develop symptoms of depression, which is called antenatal depression.

Postnatal depression can mean different things to each mother but usually includes feelings of depression, anxiety, sadness and difficulty coping, that last for more than two weeks. These feelings appear either suddenly or gradually, within the first twelve months after having a baby. No matter what each mother is feeling, postnatal depression can make it hard for her to find joy in her baby and her life. Postnatal depression can also make the mother feel that she is not in control or coping with her baby, and that she is not a good mother. It is normal for all mothers to feel anxious, tired or down at different times when they have a new baby, especially in the early weeks. However, postnatal depression is something that lasts longer and can be harder to explain.

Why would having a new baby and becoming a mother bring about such sadness, anxiety and despair? There is no one cause of postnatal depression, but there are a number of things in the mother's life that are thought to combine to contribute to the development of postnatal depression. Hormonal and chemical changes in the body and brain after childbirth are thought to play a part, but it is not usually that simple. Other stress factors such as; a demanding baby, lack of sleep and a difficult delivery may be part of it, as well as a previous depression, isolation, lack of support, childhood abuse or a difficult relationship with her partner or her own mother.

If a mother is feeling depressed or anxious for an extended time, it can be very difficult for her to get to know her baby and to blossom into the mother she would like to be. Too often mothers hide their feelings because they feel they should be able to cope. If the mother and her baby are influenced by postnatal depression for a long time, the baby may miss out on a close, responsive relationship with his mother and this can have long-term effects. The extended families of women with postnatal depression also struggle as they attempt to help and support the mother and sometimes the partners themselves can feel responsible, inadequate or even depressed.

Beyond the sadness characteristic of postnatal depression, there is recovery. With early detection, support, counselling and maybe medication, most mothers do get better and enjoy their baby and the experience of motherhood. Learning about postnatal depression and talking about the issues before or during pregnancy can help reduce the chance of a mother developing the condition. It will also help her know what is happening should she experience feelings and symptoms consistent with postnatal depression, after the baby is born.

Some mothers find it difficult to say how hard things are for them because they want to be seen as being able to cope and happy with their baby. This can get in the way of a woman asking for help from their doctor, maternal and child health nurse, family and friends. But the sooner postnatal depression is identified and the right sort of support given to the mother and her family, the earlier the process of recovery can begin. Most mothers experiencing postnatal depression find having someone to talk to can help her deal with her feelings, but recovery, may also involve building her support network of family and friends. Seeing a counsellor or joining a postnatal depression support group with other women sharing similar experiences can also be very important to her recovery. PANDA can support women during this time by providing a safe place to talk about her sadness, and linking her to existing support groups, counsellors and other support services.

