

Managing Sleep disturbance

- Sleep cycle disturbances such as difficulties getting to sleep, staying asleep or getting back to sleep, are all signs of something not being right for you. The disturbances are the result of stress, anxiety, and the obsessive thinking that can accompany depression. Over time sleep deprivation and disturbances can be very distressing, so talk to your doctor about this as soon as possible.
- Worrying about not getting enough sleep because of an unsettled baby, or your own sleep difficulties can preoccupy your thinking. Try and talk positively to yourself that you will get some sleep, but if you don't you will be okay, you can catch up the next night.
- Try to develop a routine before you go to sleep each night. For example: enjoying a warm bath, going for a walk, avoiding caffeine, alcohol and eating late, drinking hot milk or reading in bed. Activities that can help you to wind down after your day and settle your anxiety will become automatic over time.
- Try to avoid staying in bed if you are struggling to get to sleep, the more you think about it the harder it gets. It may be better to get up for a while and then go back to bed.
- Try to rest during the day when your baby does. Listen to music or relaxation tapes or read a book to help you relax. Don't worry if the housework isn't done, your rest is more important.

Realistic expectations

- Motherhood is a difficult, demanding, but rewarding job. The skills required to be a mother are learned on the job, so do not expect to know what to do all the time, it takes practice. In time you will learn if your baby is crying because he/she is hungry or tired. For many women bonding with the baby is not automatic, it grows over time and this is normal.
- Give yourself credit for the things you have achieved throughout the day, no matter how small. If you did not achieve the things you wanted, you can always try tomorrow. Do not be discouraged.
- Most importantly, be kind to yourself. You are doing the best you can.

Talking about how you are feeling

- Tell people how you are feeling. There is no need to hide it. Ensure you have someone to talk to whether it is a health professional or a trusted friend. If you don't want to speak to those close to you call PANDA's telephone support, information and referral line.

Think about your diet

- Make sure you eat well, even though you may not feel like eating. If the thought of food makes you feel sick - you cannot eat and are losing weight, or you cannot stop eating and you are gaining weight - talk to your doctor as these are signs that things are not getting better.
- Ensure that you schedule proper meal times for yourself and finish your meals. Small regular meals are better, try to avoid skipping meals. Include plenty of water in your diet.
- Prepare a few snacks like dried fruit, nuts, fresh fruit or muffins that you can leave out on the kitchen bench and snack on during the day.
- Maintain low levels of sugar, caffeine and alcohol. Have a few treats but keep them in moderation.
- Vitamin supplements can be beneficial, but discuss this with your health professional first.
- Ask your partner or family to help you to prepare a few meals on the weekend that can be kept in the freezer.

Taking Time out

- Take a routine break from being a mum; it is good thing to do!



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Fact Sheet¹⁷

RECOVERING FROM POSTNATAL DEPRESSION

Coping with a new baby and postnatal depression can be extremely overwhelming. It is okay to take some short cuts to help you get through the day. You may feel you are expected to become a supermum, look after your baby and run a perfect household. But it is more important that you take the time to recover. Sometimes it will feel like you are not getting very far, but keep going.

Postnatal depression is caused by many factors. Recovery from postnatal depression will require lots of things including the treatment of your physical health, psychological and emotional health and your social wellbeing. The following strategies, in combination, will support your recovery. The strategies aren't exhaustive but they will give you a good start.



TREATMENTS

Visiting your Doctor

- Make a double appointment to allow time to talk fully about how you are feeling. Noting down issues and questions before you visit can help focus your discussion. For further ideas see PANDA's fact sheet on seeing your doctor.
- It is important to eliminate physical contributors to the depression so ask your doctor to test for thyroid function, blood sugar, iron, and hormone levels.

Taking Medication

- Antidepressant medication is an important component of treatment for women with moderate to severe postnatal depression. These medicines correct the chemical imbalances in the brain thought to be responsible for some of the symptoms of depression and anxiety. Antidepressants are most effective when taken in combination with other forms of treatment such as counselling or group work, they will not lead to recovery on their own. For further information see PANDA's fact sheet on medication.
- There are many misconceptions about antidepressants and women who could benefit from them refuse to take them because they are afraid the medication is harmful. It is important to get good quality information about side effects, safety and how to take antidepressants, before making the decision not to take them. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or a drug information helpline.
- Antidepressants are not addictive and some can be safely taken while breastfeeding or pregnant. They should be prescribed with monitoring and follow up to make sure that they are suitable and effective for you.

Hospital admission

- If you need to go to hospital it is ideal that you be admitted with your baby to a mother and baby unit. Not all states have these units and you may need to go to a general hospital. Admission will involve a thorough assessment of your depression, medication and therapy needs and support you to start the process of recovery. See PANDA's fact sheet on coping with coming home from a mother and baby unit.



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Counselling

- Psychological treatments and counselling are very important part of recovery. There are many different approaches to counselling but the major benefit comes from the relationship you will develop with your counsellor over the period that you see them. It may take time to find the right counsellor so persevere.
- Counselling is important to help you understand what has led to your postnatal depression, particularly if you have experienced traumatic events in your childhood or more recently. It will help you to learn more about yourself and the causes of your depression. With good counselling support, recovering from postnatal depression can be a very enlightening experience, leaving you more self-aware and in a stronger emotional state than before your depression.
- Support groups are a wonderful way to meet other people who are recovering from postnatal depression and to continue your therapy in a group setting. There are many different types of groups you could benefit from. If you are interested in finding out more about support groups contact PANDA.

A – Z of coping with postnatal depression

Caring for yourself

- Put yourself first. Many mothers think that a good mother looks after everyone else first and places their own needs second. Thinking and talking about your needs and making them a priority will help you prevent as well as recover from postnatal depression.
- Make time to watch TV, read a book or participate in some other activity you enjoy. This can help take your mind off things. Sometimes it can be difficult to enjoy even your favourite things, but with treatment and recovery there will come a day when your enjoyment in life will return.
- Relaxation and nurturing yourself is very important. If possible, take time for a massage or yoga class if this interests you.
- Looking good can often help brighten your spirits and make you feel better. Take time to get dressed, and maybe put on some make up, even if you are not going out.

Connecting with your baby

- Try to play with your baby. Sometimes this can be difficult if you don't feel close to your baby. Routines such as nappies, feeding, sleeping and contact with older children are an important part of bonding with your baby. Sometimes the mother-baby bonding process can take time, and playing with your baby will help strengthen it.
- Try to make eye contact and talk with your baby, even if you don't feel like it. Babies learn a lot about their world and themselves through your facial expressions, whether happy or sad. Sometimes you might have to pretend with smiles and expressions. Be assured that this will get better with time, support and treatment.
- Your baby's relationship with his/her father and others will fill in some of the gaps when you feel you can't connect with your baby.
- Once the baby is a couple of months old try to develop day and night sleep routines. This can be hard as all babies are different, but persevere until you find the sleeping patterns and methods of settling that suit you and your baby. Talk to your maternal and child health nurse if you need support in establishing routines.

Dealing with the dark days

- If you are feeling particularly bad, unsafe and/or you think you may hurt yourself or your baby call someone to be with you. You will also need to talk to your doctor urgently. If you are unable to get your doctor's support go to the emergency department of your local hospital.
- With depression some days are really bad, your thoughts are scary and everything feels terrible. These days will occur even during recovery. It can help to expect these days and plan for them so that you have some options for coping. As you recover these days will eventually get less terrible and less frequent.

- If you are losing your cool with your baby or feeling really anxious, place your baby safely in the cot and leave him/her. It will not hurt your baby to be left for a few minutes in the cot, so that you can compose yourself. Go outside, get a cup of tea, take some deep breaths and settle yourself, even if she/he is crying. Come back to your baby when you are settled.

Dealing with your Partner

- Partners need a lot of support as it is difficult living with someone with postnatal depression. Partners often feel confused, lost and helpless. They also need a support network to talk to such as family, friends or counsellor.
- It is important that partners be included in treatment discussions with health professionals treating women with postnatal depression. Partners are much more supportive if they understand what the problem is and what they can do to help.
- Set aside time for you and your partner to spend time together. This is a stressful time for both of you and you need to spend time enjoying each other's company.

Exercising

- Take time for walks, particularly as a family. Exercise can be beneficial for both depression and anxiety. It can help you feel more in control and better about your body and gets you and your baby out of the house.
- Regular exercise that increases your heart rate for 30 minutes three times per week has a positive effect on your body and brain chemistry

Feeding your baby

- If breastfeeding is not going smoothly it can be a big part of your stress. Remember, it is one way of feeding your baby and isn't linked to whether you are a good mother.
- Get help early if you are struggling with breastfeeding. You can use hospital services, contact a lactation consultant or the Australian Breastfeeding Association.
- If possible, express milk or prepare bottles so dad can do some night feeds. This will allow you some rest and give dad a chance to bond with the baby. This can be good at weekends when he doesn't have to work and can catch up on any lost sleep.
- The "Postnatal Depression and Breastfeeding" booklet produced by PANDA and the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) has lots of strategies to support you (available from ABA).

Finding Support

- Try joining a mother - baby group, playgroup, postnatal depression support group (if there is one in your area) or asking your maternal and child health nurse to put you in touch with other mums. Although being with other people may be the last thing you feel like doing and feels daunting at first, the long term benefits will be rewarding for you and your baby. With new friends and activities, you will find yourself looking forward to meeting each week.
- Have regular social contact with other mothers. Emotional support from family and friends is really important.

Maintaining the household

- Ask for and accept any offers of help, whether it is washing, ironing or cooking. Most people are only too glad to help.
- It is okay to use pre-prepared or frozen meals for a while. They are nutritious, and can be great when you are too busy with your baby to prepare a meal, or if you are not up to cooking.
- Don't stress if the cleaning or dishes are not done. Stack the dishes and close the door so the mess doesn't worry you too much. It can always wait for another day.
- Plan one household task to do each day e.g. washing or cleaning the bathroom. Having small goals makes them feel achievable. Don't plan too much, as it may discourage you if it becomes too overwhelming.