

Your Emotional Health

When you have a new baby, it's normal to experience emotional ups and downs. But it's important for you and your loved ones to be able to recognize when you might need some extra support.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Asking for help when you need it is a sign of strength, not weakness. After all, taking care of yourself is good for both you and your baby.



MEDICAL EMERGENCY

If you have thoughts of hurting yourself or your baby, get help right away. Talk with your health care provider or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) to speak confidentially with a registered nurse.



DID YOU KNOW?

At least 23% of parents will experience depression or anxiety during pregnancy or after a birth.

The Baby Blues

What are the "baby blues"?

The typical mood changes that happen in the days after giving birth, affecting up to 80% of new mothers or birthing parents.

Not surprisingly, most people experience mood swings in the days after giving birth. Your hormones are changing, you're recovering from labour and you're tired – really tired – from caring for a newborn. The "baby blues" may have you feeling sad, restless, irritable or helpless. Minutes later, you may be happy and full of energy. Fortunately, the baby blues usually go away on their own within 2 weeks. If they don't, speak to your health care provider.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Encourage your partner to talk about their feelings. Listen and take them seriously.
- Let your partner know they're loved and valued. Give them extra physical space if they need it.
- Take on more household chores and child care.
- Prepare nutritious food for you and your partner and suggest going on walks together.
- Protect your partner's sleep by taking on more of your child's nighttime needs.
- Offer to go with them to see their health care provider.
- Don't expect that you can fix everything yourself.
- Take care of yourself and talk to someone about your feelings, too. Remember that you can also be affected by perinatal depression and anxiety.



TRY THIS

Take good care of yourself. Sleep while your child naps, remember to eat and take a daily walk with your baby. See [NESTS for Well-being](#) in the appendix.

Perinatal Depression

What is perinatal depression?

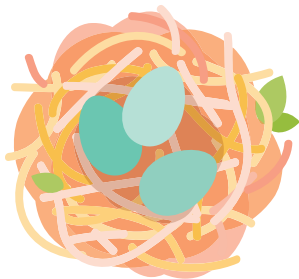
A more serious, longer lasting depression that can happen during pregnancy or after the birth.

Some people experience more serious, longer lasting distress. You may feel like you can't cope or that you might harm yourself or your baby.

Signs and symptoms of perinatal depression

Do you:

- cry uncontrollably?
- feel guilty, worthless or unfit to care for your child?
- think about harming yourself or the baby?
- have severe mood swings?
- feel sad or hopeless?
- feel unable to enjoy your baby?
- feel uninterested in your usual activities?
- feel extremely fatigued or have trouble sleeping because you're sad?



People who have had depression or anxiety before are more likely to have perinatal depression. Those with added stress in their lives – health or money problems, unstable or unsupportive relationships or a sick baby, for example – are also at higher risk.



DID YOU KNOW?

Perinatal depression can affect people of all genders and can occur during pregnancy or at any time in the year after giving birth, adopting, miscarrying or having a stillbirth.

The “NESTS” approach to self-care

- Try to eat **Nutritious** food.
- Get some daily **Exercise**, even just a quick walk around the block.
- Try to protect your **Sleep**. Ask your partner(s) to do a night feed, for example.
- Find a bit of **Time** for yourself. Hire a babysitter or ask family to help with child care.
- Seek out **Support**. Tell your partner(s), friends and family what you need. Talk with your health care provider or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1. Contact the Pacific Post Partum Support Society (postpartum.org) or join a postpartum support group.
- See the **NESTS for Well-Being** resource in the appendix or find it at: perinatalservicesbc.ca/Documents/Health-info/PSBC_NESTS_for_well-being.pdf

Perinatal Anxiety

What is perinatal anxiety?

Recurring, persistent, intense or disabling worry or fear that can happen during pregnancy or after the birth.

Some parents or caregivers worry more than usual that something bad will happen or have uncontrollable thoughts about harming their baby, either accidentally or on purpose. Anxiety disorders may also cause you to feel physically unwell.

Signs and symptoms of anxiety

Do you:

- feel dizzy, sweaty or shaky?
- have gas, constipation or diarrhea?
- feel short of breath, panicky or like your heart is racing?
- get easily startled?
- feel restless or moody?
- avoid family, friends and activities?
- have trouble sleeping because you're worried or fearful?

Anxiety may cause you to check on your baby all the time or to avoid doing day-to-day things, like driving, with them.

If you've had anxiety or depression or gone through trauma in the past, or if there's someone in your family who has had mental health issues, you may be at greater risk. Lack of sleep and not enough support may worsen anxiety and depression.

Postpartum Psychosis

What is postpartum psychosis?

A very rare and severe – but treatable – mental illness that can occur after giving birth.

Some new parents or caregivers start to behave in ways that are very unusual for them and to have thoughts that aren't based in reality. You may feel thrilled and full of energy or paranoid and suspicious. You might have thoughts of harming yourself or your baby.

Signs and symptoms of postpartum psychosis

Do you:

- feel elated, with racing thoughts?
- feel restless or moody?
- feel very confused and unable to organize and communicate your thoughts?
- feel like doing things that aren't normal for you?
- talk constantly or want to avoid family, friends and activities?
- feel like you don't need to sleep?
- feel like you're in dream?
- hear, see, feel, smell or taste things that aren't there or don't make sense?

- worry that people can't be trusted or want to harm you or your baby?
- have unusual thoughts – for example, that your baby is possessed by the devil or that you have special powers?

If you or someone in your family has bipolar disorder or a psychotic disorder, you're more at risk of perinatal psychosis. Lack of sleep also increases the risk.

Getting Help

Perinatal depression and anxiety are common and treatable. You're not alone, and there are many ways to find support. Getting help early can mean feeling better sooner.

Health care providers

Talk with your doctor, midwife, nurse practitioner, public health nurse or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 anytime, day or night, to speak confidentially with a registered nurse.

Friends, family and community

Tell the people close to you how you're feeling and listen to their concerns. Sometimes it's our friends and family who first see that we need help.

A Postpartum Support Guide may help you and your family plan ahead for the weeks and months following birth. See the appendix or find it here: perinatalservicesbc.ca/Documents/Health-info/PSBC_Postpartum_Support_Guide.pdf



MEDICAL EMERGENCY

Postpartum psychosis is a medical emergency. Seek care right away at the nearest emergency department.