

Chasing the blues away

POSTNATAL
DEPRESSION
INFORMATION
BOOKLET

Southern Health Board
Boird Shlúite An Deiscirt



*Chasing The
Blues Away*

CHASING THE

BLUES AWAY

POSTNATAL DEPRESSION INFORMATION BOOKLET



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*“I thought it
would be
different.
I have this
beautiful child.
So what is
wrong with
me?”*

Child birth can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences in any woman's life. The creation of a new life is a very personal experience which brings enormous pride, pleasure and responsibility. The first few weeks pass in a flurry of visitors, well-wishers, helpers, and a general excitement about the new addition to your family.

While it is a very exciting time, new mums can and do feel tired, stressed and sometimes overwhelmed by their new circumstances; these feelings are natural and a period of adjustment is to be expected.

However, for some women these feelings may persist. The weeks and months following childbirth may be a time of extreme exhaustion due to lack of sleep. As the short-term support network quietly fades into the background, the new mum is left with the overwhelming realisation that she is now responsible for the health, happiness and well-being of an extremely vulnerable child. She may be unable to share her feelings, suffer alone and become confused about what is happening. If this is the case, it might be that the new mum has postnatal depression and help should be sought.

Postnatal Depression

Postnatal depression is a reaction to a life event. Many generations of women have lived through this, which went unrecognised, but this does not have to be the case.

- Education and support during pregnancy and after childbirth can help.
- Seeking proper support and diagnosis can also help.

Such help can lessen the effect of postnatal depression on the whole family and assist in a speedy recovery.

The purpose of this booklet is to highlight this problem and to help mothers and their families seek the necessary assistance. It should also help to assure all concerned that full recovery is possible.

“I want to reach out, as I’ve been there too, but I remember the shame so I can’t.”

Mother-in-law

True stories

The following stories show the emotional roller-coaster ride, which some mothers go through after giving birth. With help and early intervention all these mums have recovered, regained their confidence and have gone on to enjoy motherhood.

Mary's Story

(24 year old nurse)

"I was the mother of a beautiful baby girl, had a normal delivery and everything went well. It was my first baby and the first grandchild, so as soon as she was born I had a lot of visitors.

I should have felt wonderful but instead on the third day I felt miserable, tearful, upset and unable to sleep. My baby was jaundiced and not feeding properly. Everybody was telling me what to do but I felt useless, unable to cope and had no appetite. I felt disappointed in myself and did not want my family and friends to know what a failure I thought I was. I needed someone to talk to for advice and help, but I did not have the courage to ask."

Sally's Story

(19 year old teenager)

"I got pregnant and I was not ready. Nine months later, following a very hard birth, my baby arrived and I did not know what to do. I felt totally miserable, but I did not want anybody to know. After coming home I fell into a routine. The baby was fed and clean, but somewhere in this I was lost. I wanted somebody to tell me what was wrong with me but at the same time how could I tell anybody that I couldn't cope. Why did I not want this baby? Why couldn't I have my old life back? I continued to feel this way for months. My partner knew that something was wrong, but didn't know what to do and so I felt totally alone."

remember

- *During pregnancy and following the birth women can feel a wide range of emotions, from joy to sadness, from worry to feeling unable to cope.*
- *Sometimes, in spite of help and support, women still may feel bewildered and scared, especially in the early weeks. The important thing to remember is that these feelings are very common and usually last for a short period.*
- *New mothers should not blame themselves for their feelings, which are common and easily treated.*

Angie's Story

(30 year old homemaker)

“The days after the birth were a disaster, visitors calling, telephone ringing and neighbours popping in to welcome the new arrival. Friends were very good at offering to help but I was too proud to let anyone help me. I was now a mother and responsible for another life. I told myself I should be able to cope, however I still worried, rushed around cleaning, washing and fretting over my baby. With the result that as the days went by instead of feeling better I was feeling worse. I could not rest even when my baby was sleeping, nor could I relax as my mind could not rest. I was scared, not sleeping and felt alone but most of all I felt a failure. I could not wait for Jim to get home from work but when he did I often snapped his head off and got myself worked up over the slightest thing. What was happening to me? Was I going mad? I was afraid to ask if all mothers go through this panic.”

“We used to be able to talk about anything, but not now. Why won't she let me help?”

Partner

John's Story

(35 year old husband)

“We waited a long time for our baby so she was very precious to us. I could not wait for them to come home so that we could be one big happy family. For a while after the birth my wife was in great form though very tired. Parents and friends were a great help and everything seemed to be great.

As time passed things seemed to change. The baby was not sleeping well and keeping us up all night. This wore us down. My wife gradually became very down in herself and got upset over silly little things. Before the birth she was full of life and always laughing. I did not know what was happening. I dreaded coming home every evening to find her sitting at the table crying.

I tried to take time off work to help but as I was self-employed I did not get paid if I did not work. It was becoming very difficult to cope, trying to make ends meet and worrying about my wife and new baby. I wondered what was happening to us. It was not something men talked about with their pals. I did not know who or where to turn for help. How could I get my wife to accept help when she would not even talk to me?”

Normal Feelings after Childbirth

Pinks

For the first three days after giving birth, although tired most women can feel ‘on top of the world’, that is, they feel happy, excited and thrilled with themselves and their new baby, this may affect their normal sleep patterns.

However, a small number of women may feel down after the birth and may not bond with their baby. This can be very upsetting but normally these feelings pass in a couple of days.

Baby Blues

Around the third or fourth day after giving birth, most women go through what is known as the ‘baby blues’. This is quite normal and very common and may last up to a week.

How you may be feeling:

- Crying for no reason
- Tired and weary
- Feeling useless
- Anxious (stressed out)
- Unable to sleep
- Cross and cranky
- Not eating properly

remember

- *If after a couple of weeks things have not improved, please do not be afraid to talk to your public health nurse or general practitioner. They are there to help you.*

What can you do to help yourself?

- Rest, rest and more rest, take naps when you can and as often as you can.
- Do not be too hard on yourself. You do not have to be superwoman. Accept help around the house from family and friends.
- Eat a healthy diet, a little and often if your appetite is poor. Take plenty of drinks especially if breastfeeding.
- Talk about your feelings to your partner and friends and allow yourself to have a good cry if you feel upset.
- Treat yourself and try to organise time for yourself and your partner.

What partners/family/friends can do to help:

- Be aware that most new mothers go through the ‘baby blues’. Be patient and willing to help with the baby and the housework.
- Give the new mother time out to rest and relax.

“Why does a woman go through all of this (pregnancy and childbirth) and end up feeling this way?”

Postnatal Depression

What is it?

Postnatal depression is a term used to cover feelings of depression after having a baby. At first many women are tired, feel unsure and are not able to cope when they come home from hospital. This normally passes within a couple of weeks. However, for mothers with postnatal depression, things do not improve.

DEPRESSION
POSTNATAL

Mothers may not know what is wrong with them and do not want anybody else to know their feeling about themselves and their baby. This makes it difficult to look for help, but by doing so, the mother can get the support and help she needs to make a speedy recovery.

The main points to look for are:

- A lack of interest in yourself or the baby.
- Unable to cope, finding everything is an effort.
- Feeling that you are a bad mother, guilty and ashamed.
- Fear of being left alone with your baby.
- Feeling angry, confused and unable to concentrate.
- Feelings of panic, anxiety, dizziness, fast heart beat, sick in your stomach and sweating.
- Feeling exhausted yet unable to sleep properly (finding it hard to get to sleep and/or waking up very early in the morning).
- No interest in food or over eating.
- No interest in sexual relations.
- Feelings of hopelessness.

“I don’t remember her mother being like this. Maybe we should do something, but what?” **Father**

What can you do to help yourself?

- Accept there is a problem and you need help.
- Talk to your partner, family or friends. They will want to help. We all expect to be able to cope and when we can not, we feel guilty. But remember, it is not your fault and you can be helped.
- Ask for advice and support from your public health nurse, general practitioner or community nurse.
- Postnatal depression does not last forever and the sooner it is recognised the sooner you will get better.

remember

- *Some mothers have difficult births. Some are alone and have no support. Before the mother leaves the maternity hospital it is important for her to talk to the midwife or liaison public health nurse.*

What partners, family and friends can do to help

- Encourage the new mother to talk about how she feels.
- Ask family and friends to help around the house.
- Be patient and supportive.
- Try to ensure the new mother gets enough food and rest.
- Organise babysitting so that you can have time together as a couple.
- Partners, be aware that the new mother may not be in the mood for sexual relations but does need love and affection.

- Reassure the new mother that she will recover.
- Ensure that the new mother attends her postnatal appointments.
- Be prepared to seek help for the new mother and yourself if necessary through the public health nurse, general practitioner or community nurse.
- Allow the new mother and baby time to bond and get to know each other without feeling under stress.
- In extreme cases hospital care may be needed.

Conclusion

- Try not to be so anxious that you lose your good feelings about your baby.
- Please, if you are able, write down the good moments, and share them with your partner, family or friends. It will help you to see that positives do exist, no matter how small.
- Talk to other mothers. They may have had the same problems and could help.

“After the baby was born, what should have been the happiest time of my life was not. It was hell.”

We all expect to feel a gush of love for our new baby. This may not happen straight away for every mother. Skills will come with time and experience. Do not be afraid to look for help.

Health Services for Mothers & Babies

“What can I do? I’ve babysat, helped with housework, but it’s not enough”.

Friend

Before the Baby is Born (Antenatal)

General Practitioner (G.P.) Services

- During the pregnancy, every woman is entitled to:

At least 7 antenatal general practitioner visits.

One postnatal general practitioner visit at 2 weeks for the mother.

One postnatal general practitioner visit at 6 weeks for both the mother and baby.

- You can apply for this service through your general practitioner.

Your general practitioner normally refers you to the maternity hospital (unit) of your choice. The care of expectant mothers is shared between the general practitioner, hospital and maternity services.

“I can’t talk to her, she’s so distant and grumpy, sometimes it’s like walking on eggshells”.

Brother

Home Births

There is a Home Birth's Scheme run by the Southern Health Board, who engage the services of independent midwives. For further information, please contact:

The Co-ordinator,
Home Births Services,
Floor 2, Abbey Court House,
George’s Quay,
Cork.
Tel: 021 4965511

Maternity Hospital/Unit

Expectant mothers attend antenatal (before birth) clinics on a regular basis at the maternity hospital/unit. The progress of both the mother and baby are closely monitored and services are provided at these clinics by medical staff, midwives, public health nurses, dieticians, social workers and physiotherapists.

Parent craft classes, which involve preparing for birth and education for parenthood are also available at the hospital/unit or details of local classes are also given on request.

Maternity hospital/unit, antenatal ward services are available both day and night for any problems during pregnancy. Also a help line is provided for any queries that may arise. (See overleaf for details)

HOSPITAL SERVICE

Antenatal Clinic (clinic to attend before baby is born)

St. Finbarr’s Hospital and Erinville Hospital, Cork

- Referred by your general practitioner to hospital / unit of your choice.
- Scan is performed at Ultrasound Department between 16 and 18 weeks.
- Booking visit with midwife or obstetrician.
- Public health nurse, dietician, physiotherapist, social worker are all available by appointment.

- Parent craft classes are also available by appointment.
- Outreach Antenatal Clinic at Bantry General Hospital.

Contact: Outpatient Department, Bantry General Hospital.
Tel: 027 52900

Return visits by appointment only.

“I was so looking forward to having this baby and now I feel so utterly miserable.”

Antenatal Ward (St. Finbarr’s and Erinville Hospitals)

- 24-hour admission for any complications of pregnancy.
- 24-hour phone line for any queries or concerns.

St. Finbarr’s Hospital,
Douglas, Cork.
Tel: 021 4923221

Erinville Hospital,
Western Road, Cork.
Tel: 021 4921510

(Antenatal and Postnatal Wards)

Tralee General Hospital

Tel: 066 7184324

- Booking clinic with midwife or obstetrician, by appointment.
- Scan is performed at booking clinic.
- Parent craft classes by appointment with midwife.
- Physiotherapist available by appointment.
- Drop-in clinic, please contact hospital for details.
- 24-hour phone service for any queries or complications of pregnancy.
Tel: 066 7184324

After the Baby is Born (Postnatal)

During their stay in hospital both mother and baby have a wide range of services available to them including all necessary medical services, midwives, liaison public health nurse, physiotherapist, social workers, and the provision of parent craft classes. Access to other services such as counselling and mental health services is provided when required.

St. Finbarr's and Erinville Hospitals

- Midwives available.
- 24-hour phone line on discharge from hospital.
- Access to counselling, social worker, mental health services etc. if required.

St. Finbarr's Hospital only

- A baby clinic for infants up to 6 weeks of age is available every Thursday, 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. in Clinic B. This is held by the liaison public health nurse and the midwife. No appointments are necessary.
- The liaison public health nurse works with the maternity hospital/unit, meets every new mother and is in contact with the public health nurse in your area.

- There is also a 24-hour telephone service available for new mothers after discharge to answer queries and provide support.

Tralee General Hospital

- Midwives available at all times.
- 24-hour phone line on discharge from hospital.

Tel: 066 7184318

Southern Health Board Maternity Departments

St. Finbarr's Hospital,
Douglas Road, Cork.
Tel: 021 4966555

Erinville Hospital,
Western Road, Cork.
Tel: 021 4275211

Tralee General Hospital,
Tralee, Co. Kerry.
Tel: 066 7184000

Private Hospital Services

Bons Secours Hospital,
Maternity Department,
College Road, Cork.
Tel: 021 4542807

After Discharge from Hospital

General Practitioner Services

Every new mother is entitled to:

- One postnatal general practitioner visit at 2 weeks for the mother.
- One postnatal general practitioner visit at 6 weeks for both the mother and baby.

Community Public Health Nursing Service

Public health nurses are also midwives with special training in community nursing and provide the following services:

- When you leave hospital with your baby they will visit you in your home.
- Advice for both you and your baby.
- On going support for the mother, baby and family especially in the first weeks after birth.
- Regular checks on the development and growth of the baby.

If you have any problems e.g. coping, feeding, sleeping or any other worries, the public health nurse is there to provide help and understanding.

The Public Health Nursing Departments listed below will provide the name, address and telephone number of the public health nurse in your local area.

Cork City

North & South Lee,
Abbey Court House,
George's Quay, Cork.
Tel: 021 4695511

North Cork


Gouldshill House,
Mallow, Co. Cork.
Tel: 022 30200

West Cork

Hospital Grounds,
Skibbereen, Co. Cork.
Tel: 028 21722

Kerry

18 – 20 Denny Street,
Tralee, Co. Kerry.
Tel: 066 7121566

A close-up, side-profile photograph of a baby with dark hair, wearing a light-colored striped shirt, sitting at a piano and playing. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

“I thought it would be different. I have this beautiful child. So what is wrong with me?”

Other useful contacts

15

Aware (Depression Support Group)

Cork
Tel: 021 4550027
Killarney
Tel: 064 33918

Cuidiu

Tel: 021 4292168

Women's Support Group, which provides help in relation to women's health. “Bumps and Babies” group, breastfeeding information, and antenatal sessions.

Gingerbread

Tel: 021 4551335

Support group for one parent families. Information on entitlements, family events and education are provided.

Home Birth Association

Tel: 01 8206940

Midwives available for home births.

**Homestart**

Tel: 021 4506123

Homestart offer support, friendship and practical help to young families under stress, in their own homes.

La Leche League

Bantry Tel: 027 50092
Clonakilty Tel: 023 38745
Douglas Tel: 021 4899534
Killarney Tel: 064 44750

Telephone and information service, group support for breastfeeding mothers.

Tuas Nua

Contact Y.M.C.A.,
11/12 Malboro Street, Cork.
Tel: 021 4270187

Support group for young mothers. Services include ante and postnatal classes, parenting courses, creche facilities and home visits.

Post Natal Distress Support Group

Tel: 021 4923162

Provides information and offers support to women suffering from postnatal depression.

Samaritans

Callsave 1850 609090
Tralee Tel: 066 7122566


Listening service for people who are lonely, depressed or suicidal.

St. Vincent de Paul Society

Cork (2 Tuckey Street, Cork)
Tel: 021 4270444

Tralee (Friary Lane, Tralee)
Tel: 066 7128021

“I haven’t felt like myself since the baby was born.”

A person is riding a bicycle on a beach at sunset. The person is in profile, facing right, and is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and shorts. The background is a bright, hazy sunset over the ocean, with the sun low on the horizon. The overall color palette is soft and blue-toned.

*“I didn’t want
them to know how
I felt as I was so
ashamed.”*

POSTNATAL DEPRESSION INFORMATION BOOKLET

Southern Health Board
Bord Sláinte An Deisirt



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