

PartnerSupportProgram

Welcome!

This program is designed specifically to help new mothers with postnatal depression and anxiety to understand how they are feeling and to learn to develop some useful skills to manage their mood. This will involve identifying some of the factors that influence their mood, and making changes in the way they think and manage some of the demands of motherhood.

By being a part of this program your partner has already taken a significant step toward recovery. As she works with the online sessions she will learn to identify and understand personal patterns that can lead to feeling depressed. And she will learn specific steps that she can follow to improve her mood and enjoy motherhood. You may notice her trying out new ways of behaving or communicating her needs to you.

This Partner Support Website has been designed to give you some background information as well as some specific recommendations for how you can support your partner while she works to get on top of her depression. We also hope to give you some valuable tips to support you in your adjustment to your new baby.

We will focus on 3 areas often mentioned by partners with new babies as they make the transition to parenthood.

- **Caring for yourself**
- **Caring for your partner**
- **Caring for your baby**

This program is designed for all partners with new babies.

Taking Steps to Get Better

Seeking help, as your partner has done, takes courage. You will have a positive impact on your family's well-being by providing support (as you do day-to-day). You are also supporting your family by reading this information and joining with the program. Your partner will need your support to work through the sessions and to implement the strategies suggested. Anything you can do to support her would be helpful.

Families are tight-knit units: things that affect your partner can also affect you, things that you feel, say, and do can affect her. And both of you can have a profound impact on your baby. And your baby's behaviour can have an impact on both of you.

1. CARING FOR YOURSELF

Changes in Your Life

Many partners experience a sense of joy and achievement when they watch their new baby grow up, knowing that they have played a unique role in their development. As a partner, you will experience wonderful highs, many joys and intense feelings of love, and closeness. Reflecting on having a new baby, you probably know that it has added a dimension to your identity and it has brought a sense of completeness to your life. Building a relationship with your baby can be a deeply rewarding experience.

Having a baby can cause many other changes in your life: While you may have been pretty confident that having a baby would affect your life in lots of ways – emotional, financial, and social – you may have been caught off guard by the sheer number and the magnitude of the changes you are experiencing.



Here are a few things that other partners have said:

- 'I never expected that baby could be so emotionally needy and demanding.'
- 'I knew I'd lose sleep, but I didn't expect to feel this exhausted!'
- 'I miss the leisure time and closeness my partner and I shared before-it's hard including a third person in your relationship. It's a bit sad not to be "Number one" in my partner's eyes anymore.'
- 'I expected my life would continue on much as before with work and sport. It really hit home when I realized that playing sports just wasn't an option anymore because it meant leaving my wife with too much responsibility for the kids.'
- 'My work has become second priority to my role as a dad, which surprised me because before the baby arrived my career was my top priority.'
- 'Sex? What's that again?'
- 'My wife's breasts were enormous but I felt they were for the baby, not for me.'

- 'We've needed to be really patient and tolerant with one another, because we're both tired and going through a lot of adjustments. It's taken me awhile to develop my confidence as a dad-for a long time I felt like I was being told what to do by my partner.'

Do any of these statements sound like some of your thoughts?

Being a Partner is Stressful

Making changes is stressful. Many partners with new babies are stressed out as they try to juggle sleepless nights and helping at home, with the need to still attend and perform well at work all while still adjusting to their new role of being a parent. But few recognize this or ask for help!

Relationships change as you move from being a couple to being a family if it is your first child. Many things have to be re-negotiated in your relationship. For example: Who does what?



Some partners say that they have a difficult time measuring up to their own expectations of the ideal parent. Others are unsure what to do with their new baby.

Partners with new babies can also feel very pushed aside. All of the focus is on the baby and the mother, so the mum's partner may feel overlooked. Your partner is consumed by the needs of the baby, and you may feel ignored.

For some families the pregnancy and birth have not gone as smoothly as anticipated and these events can be difficult to deal with. Premature babies, ill health in mother or baby or loss of family members at this time add their own stress that needs to be dealt with.

Partners often feel they need to be the strong ones when it comes to supporting their partner through these times but may not recognize their own needs for support.

Depressed Partner

In addition to all of the other changes in your life, you have discovered that your partner is experiencing postnatal depression, something neither of you expected nor bargained for.

It isn't easy living with someone who is depressed. The demands put on you at this time—sleep deprivation, work commitments, managing child care, home duties, visits to health professionals, and the inquiries from family, friends and work colleagues, to name a few—can make you feel tired, confused and possibly angry and guilty. You may also be feeling uncertain, doubtful and insecure about the future and possibly alienated or disconnected from your partner. Partners report they experience postnatal depression as overwhelming, isolating, stigmatizing and frustrating. This is normal and you are not alone.

Some partners may also experience the symptoms of depression in conjunction with their partners. If you think this may apply to you discuss your concerns with your doctor.



Who Nurtures You?

With all of the care that you are giving to your partner and your baby, don't forget about yourself. You have a need to be looked after, too. You probably get most of your nurturing from your partner. Now that she is busy with your baby and struggling to keep her mood in balance, you may feel very alone and unsupported.

- Take some time off of baby tasks and housework in order to spend some quality time with your partner.
- Your own family may also offer the back up you need at this time if your partner is unable to provide it. Work colleagues and friends can also be supportive if you make them aware.



- Use whatever supports are there for you, or take some time to figure out new ways to improve or enlarge your network of support. Becoming a parent also opens up opportunities to make new support contacts. Think about whether you have a network of other parents with new babies to share your experience with or ask advice from.

8 Survival Tips

Here is a list of “Survival Tips” from partners of women with postnatal depression:

- Tip #1:** Accept help from everyone. This can include home help, food in the freezer, childcare and gardening.
- Tip #2:** Be prepared that some people close to you and your partner will not understand the severity of your problems.
- Tip #3:** Stay in close contact with friends and family. Make sure you have someone to talk to about your problems both at home and at work.
- Tip #4:** Recognize the efforts you are making for your family. It’s possible you may feel frustrated with how things have turned out but try not to express anger or resentment to your partner. No one is to blame.
- Tip #5:** Stay active. Play sports that consume energy like basketball but that don’t keep you away from home too long. Sports get you out and around people.
- Tip #6:** Make sure that you and your partner get out of the house on a regular basis – with or without the children. Try to be positive in front of your partner even if your confidence in what the future holds is wavering.
- Tip #7:** At times, take the anger should it fly your way, remember she does not mean all that she says it is symptomatic of her illness.
- Tip #8:** Reassure your partner that she will get better, as she needs all the positive reinforcement she can get.

2. CARING FOR YOUR PARTNER

What your Partner may be Feeling

Your partner is experiencing many of the same changes and related stress as she makes her transition to motherhood. It may not be quite what she expected. Myths about motherhood – and parenthood can create unrealistic expectations that can lead your partner to feel like she is a failure when things don't go according plan. This can be associated with starting on the downward spiral of depression.



Postnatal Depression (PND): What is it?

Antenatal depression, postnatal depression, and postpartum depression are all terms used to describe a depressive episode that begins during pregnancy or during the year following the birth of a baby. It is not a sign of being a bad mother or a sign of weakness but a well-recognized and common problem that can be treated. Tiredness and fatigue that does not get better even with rest can be a sign of depression.

While the vast majority (almost 80%) of new mothers feel “blue” for a few days after birth, postnatal depression affects about 1 out of every 8 women. The symptoms associated with postnatal depression are listed in the table. It is the most common complication among women who have just had a baby. The experience is more severe and long lasting – it causes greater interference in being able to enjoy each day and the symptoms often feel like descending into a black hole.

Symptoms of Postnatal Depression
A. Low mood, irritability
B. Less interest in or pleasure from activities
C. Significant changes in your appetite or weight gain (unrelated to your pregnancy)
D. Problems sleeping or falling asleep (even when your baby is sleeping)
E. Lack of energy or tiredness
F. Feeling worthless or guilty
G. Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
H. Repeated thoughts about death and suicide
I. Changes in the way you move (restless or slowed down)

Research has identified a number of factors that are linked to postnatal depression:

- a complicated birth
- changes in hormones
- personal or family history of depression

- an unhappy or abusive childhood
- a tendency to feel anxious or guilty
- relationship problems
- lack of support
- increased life stress

Please keep in mind that your partner may not have had any of these factors and yet she can still be experiencing postnatal depression.

Myths & Facts

Myths about parenting can create unrealistic expectations that, in turn, can lead to feelings of failure when coping problems occur. It might be unrealistic to expect that your partner will adjust quickly, or that your baby will be just as you, and she, imagined.

Myth: Parenting should be obvious and easy.

Fact: Nobody is born knowing what it takes to be a successful parent. We learn a lot about it from our parents, from the way we were raised. In addition, we learn from our babies: about what they need, what we need, and how we grow up together. There is a lot of trial and error.

Myth: New babies are perfect little beings.

Fact: New babies are, in fact, miraculous. But that is not to say that their behaviour is “perfect.” Some babies are hard to settle and, at times, it may be difficult for the mother to know what they need. Nor do babies always look “perfect” because they come in all sizes and shapes, and they sometimes look funny to you and others.

Myth: New parents always feel a sense of fulfillment and pride in raising their new baby.

Fact: New parents often experience wonderful highs and many joys and intense feelings of love and closeness with their baby. But these positive feelings are balanced with times of frustration, total fatigue and sleep deprivation, and other emotional challenges.

Myth: Partners should know what to do to be supportive.

Fact: Many partners and new mothers do not know exactly how to be successful parents. This is true when it comes to tending to the needs of the new baby as well as to the needs of each other.

Myth: New mothers should be able to figure out what to do on their own.

Fact: All mother-child relationships ideally develop over time within a network of support. Mothers benefit greatly from the support they get from their partner, friends, family, neighbors, and other mothers.

Myth: Postnatal depression is normal -- all new mothers feel tired and depressed.

Fact: New mothers often feel tired and overwhelmed. They may be experiencing "baby blues." Women with baby blues may feel tired, weepy, and have no energy. However, the feelings that go with postnatal depression are stronger and longer lasting. A mother may not want to play with her baby. She may have trouble paying attention to things and may not be able to meet her baby's needs for warmth and affection. She may feel guilty or worthless.

There are also myths about postnatal depression that may hinder your ability to recognize its early signs, its seriousness, or to take action to begin treating the problem.

Communicate More Effectively

The ability to communicate with your partner is essential for the recovery process. It is important to encourage communication about feelings so your relationship can be rebuilt, maintained and strengthened. A useful start is to:

- Accept each other's feelings
- Share your experiences
- Listen without interruption or judgment (it's okay not to have all of the answers all of the time)
- Understand that it will take time to adjust
- Ask what sort of help your partner needs most from you
- Share what sorts of things you need from her
- Be prepared to help in practical ways and to accept help when it is offered
- Notice something that your partner has done that you like, and let them know about it



Acts of Kindness for Your Partner

As life changing as this experience is for you, you need to understand that mothers need time out from home and baby. Support you offer her at this crucial time will help to get your lives back on track. Be patient and encouraging. Give your partner emotional support (listen) and get more involved in taking over some of the burden, when possible, regarding feeding, changing diapers, bathing, and other parenting tasks. If you have not been so involved in this to date then it may feel

a little scary caring for your baby alone initially. This will give you the opportunity to develop your own relationship with your baby and your own ways of doing things.

Some “little acts of kindness” you can do to support your partner are:

- ✓ Make her a cup of tea or coffee for your partner
- ✓ Offer to take over settling the baby
- ✓ Offer to get some takeout food on the way home from work
- ✓ Prepare a meal
- ✓ Give her a hug and tell them they are doing a great job
- ✓ Buy her a gift
- ✓ Send her an upbeat, loving email message
- ✓ Give her extra time to sleep and take baby out of the house
- ✓ Don't take it to heart when she is irritable and snappy.
- ✓ Sit together with her as she feeds the baby. Make it “family time.”
- ✓ Share your feelings openly with her so she knows your thoughts and the two of you can work through the challenges together.

By offering your commitment and support, you can make a big difference in speeding her recovery from her depression. It may surprise you just how “sexy” some of these “little acts” will be to your partner!

What does She Want from Me?

Here is a peek into further understanding how your partner may be feeling -- but not saying -- and what she may want from you:

- ‘I love it when my partner figures out what to do without asking me all the time.’
- ‘I like to be able to tell him what I am worried about and for him to understand but I don't need him to tell me not to worry or to try to solve the problem, I just want him to listen.’
- ‘It's great when he just helps with the baby without me telling him to.’
- ‘It really helps to just have him listen and understand me.’
- ‘Sometimes just a hug and a shoulder to cry on can help so much.’
- ‘It helps when he gives me a break because it is a 24-hour job!’

3. CARING FOR YOUR BABY

Getting to Know Each Other

Building a relationship with your baby can be a deeply rewarding experience. Take every opportunity to spend time alone interacting. You provide special experiences for your baby through your interactions. You spend time with your baby in a different way than your partner does, and your baby will learn crucially important things about love relationships through the emotional connection he/she has with you.



Here is a list of nurturing activities you can share with your baby:

- Spend some time just watching your baby. Wonder how they feel and try to communicate their needs to you. Observe their behaviour and how they interact with you.
- Play with and talk to (laugh with) your baby. Play increases the bond and attachment you both share. Even very little babies can imitate your facial expressions and watch you as you sing to them or show them things.
- Notice what your baby likes – for example, looking at the trees, being held securely, playing peek-a-boo!
- Be involved in your baby's life: settling to sleep, walking around with them if they are unsettled or cuddling them on the couch while you watch TV. If you are using a bottle along with or instead of breastfeeding, make sure you do some of the feedings.
- Change and dress your baby.
- Bathe your baby.

Understanding the Needs of your Baby

There is no such thing as a 'perfect' parent. You can't always know what your baby wants, it takes trial and error. What you can do is provide a consistent flow of warm, responsive, reliable nurturing – which is what your baby needs. Babies thrive on lots of physical contact, attention and care. They do best if they feel that someone is emotionally 'tuned in' to them and understands them. Trying to respond sensitively and appropriately to your baby's gestures allows them to feel understood.

If you are consistent and devoted in your nurturing, your parenting will be 'good enough' for your infant. You do not have to match you baby perfectly, as long as we get it right about 60% of the time. So relax and enjoy!

Babies learn a lot about themselves from interactions with their parents. A baby's behaviour mirrors back its parent's emotional state. When the baby is getting upset and a little grizzly, a parent is likely to change voice and expression to convey empathy in a way that helps the baby manage its feelings.

Baby's Sense of Safety and Security

A parent's capacity to reflect on and understand a new baby's internal experience is what helps the child feel safe and secure in the world. The child feels understood and comforted by understanding parents. They need their parents to help them organize their feelings.

For instance: imagine a baby who grows very tired and becomes worked up. Parents can recognize the signs that their baby is overtired. They know from experience that at these times their baby is difficult to soothe and can't go to sleep. They learn over time that they can help their baby calm down enough to be able to go to sleep.

In order to understand their child's experience a parent must think about the situation from their baby's perspective: how would they feel, what would they want, and then what could be helpful? A parent who can interpret what they think their baby is feeling or what they want, will let their baby know they understand by mirroring back these feelings and intentions.

- "Oh you're tired now, come on lets go for a little walk around the garden to help you calm down a bit."
- The tone of voice, the way the parent looks at and holds their baby and the look on their face all convey to the baby that their parent understands and is able to help

Growing Together Through Play

Play for your baby is touching, tasting, looking and listening. Play is essential for mental and emotional growth. Through play, babies learn about themselves and the world. Play helps the brain to develop and sets the stage for successful social interaction.

When babies are contented and alert, they are most ready and able to engage in interaction and play. Playing starts with looking at things, and listening to the world around them, and it progresses to touch and taste. These are the way your baby explores and learns about their new environment.

Through play, you can help your child to explore. These play sessions will start out small, and grow as your baby grows.



Try:

- ✓ Singing songs, humming, or reading to your baby
- ✓ Let them explore natural objects (keeping safety in mind, as soon as baby's can hold an object, it will go directly into their mouths).
- ✓ Notice as much as you can about your baby, their alertness and activity. Notice how they change each day.
- ✓ Try to imagine how your baby might feel and how he might experience the world.
- ✓ When settling, try to communicate to your baby that you understand their distress.
- ✓ Make faces and different noises. Imitate baby. Pause and watch their responses. When they look away, pause and wait for them to look back.
- ✓ Take your baby for a walk in the pram so they can see and hear different things.

4. NEXT STEPS

We hope that this Web-based program has provided you with some practical ways to better cope with this very challenging time in your life. Your willingness to support and nurture your partner and baby makes it more likely that you will continue to see improvement in your relationship and your family functioning.

Recovery often consists of highs and lows rather than a steady or sudden improvement in mood. Occasional lapses are expected and they don't signal another episode of depression. The time between low days gets longer. The lows are less debilitating and are more easily overcome. Your partner's needs, your needs, and the needs of your baby will change with time. It is important that you continue to communicate and problem-solve as you confront new challenges of parenthood. You can get through this together.



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