



Post Natal Depression

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Sarah put her hands over her ears to try to block out the cries of her five month old daughter, alone in the house she felt overwhelmed by emotion and unable to move. Since Rosie's birth she had experienced increasing anxiety, felt that she was a useless Mum and had suicidal thoughts. Luckily for both of them a friend who was worried about them unexpectedly called by and eventually persuaded Sarah to get some professional help.

Sarah's story is not uncommon, a recent study in the USA shows that 50 to 80 percent of new Mothers and 30 percent of new Fathers suffer post natal depression (also known as post partum depression).

Symptoms range from lethargy and feeling tearful, to debilitating mood swings and suicidal thoughts that prevent even the strongest of parents from bonding with the new baby, or dealing with the most simple daily tasks.

Although not given its title and recognised by psychologists until around 1968, as far back as Aristotle post natal depression was documented, and midwives have long been aware of the 'baby blues'.

Hormonal changes associated with pregnancy and birth can make a Mother feel overwhelmed for a few days – the 'baby blues', but to understand continued depressive feelings it is necessary to look at the huge sociological change and psychological demands that a new baby requires.

Having a baby is a major transition, and most parents are ill prepared for the effect on life style and relationship.

Mothers report

- Feeling overwhelmed and tearful
- Snappy and irritable
- Not feeling close to the baby
- Great tiredness
- Feeling alone, no one to turn too

Although most commonly attributed to women, recent NHS studies point out the seriousness of men becoming depressed after the birth of a new baby. An NHS trust in the Essex in the UK has set up a trial help line for Fathers who are struggling too. 0845 120 3746 (lines opened March 2005)

Fathers report

- Feeling a huge weight of responsibility
- Inadequacy in a supportive role for their partner
- Anxiety around the birth and worry about their ability to be a good parent
- No feelings for the baby
- Feeling very stressful around the Mother, feeling a loss of closeness with them

The above is not a surprise when you consider that during the first six weeks normal routines of sleep, work and play are abandoned as life revolves around the baby's needs. There is no time or energy to chat, see friends, sleep may be hard to come by and the idea of being that super mum and wife becomes a forgotten dream.

Tiredness and worry cause us to act emotionally and prevent clear thinking, the head spins with thoughts as our rational brain gets side lined and we react immediately to our thoughts and feelings. It becomes a downward spiral where the joy of a new baby is hard to access, oh then guilt raises its rotten head.

Post Natal Depression Treatment

But post natal depression can be treated and the first step to feeling better is to recognise that lack of sleep makes us grumpy, unreasonable and lethargic. Nothing to do with your character, it is a fact of being human. Ever remember seeing a small child, with arms and legs flailing around, screaming their head off because they have got too tired and lost the plot? Same emotion, bigger body and no one to pick you up and tuck you into bed.

If you used to spend quality time with your partner, worked, saw friends, exercised and did things that bought you feelings of satisfaction, then the isolation that early motherhood can bring cuts off your supply of emotional nourishment. So you can begin to relax because if you have been nodding your head as you read this it is normal to feel low.

And it is also normal to recover from this, so what can you do?

- Talk to your partner and close friends, make a plan and focus on what will help to make the difference, ensure that you have some practical support. The focus must be on action rather than emotion.
- Contact your community nurse or health visitor, she will be used to seeing this and can give you some help and reassurance
- Take time to relax, learn how to relax using the power of self hypnosis, www.hypnosisdownloads.com
- Read the books, listen to others but relax and trust your instincts
- Meet other Mums even if you feel that they are doing better than you...they will all have had their worries and down days.
- Exercise, even a light walk produces serotonin, nature's feel good chemical
- Take a look at www.clinical-depression.co.uk especially at the relaxation exercises and explanatory styles
- Find a film or something that makes you giggle

- Check out your diet, you will probably need to take some omega 3 and 6, also the baby strips the Mothers zinc supply so taking a zinc supplement can really transform the way you feel. In the UK try www.highernature.com . Here are a few other tips too.
 - Eat a lot of oily fish, herring, mackerel, sardines, salmon and tuna are all good.
 - Eat a lot of raw fruit and vegetables (organic if possible) and seeds. Make up this mixture and use on breakfast cereal and in soups, one tablespoon a day. Make up equal quantities of sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds and then three times the amount of flax (linseeds) together in a blender. Grind them until they are granulated and store the mixture in the fridge.
 - Drink lots of water especially if you are breast feeding
- If you feel that you need some professional help seek the help of a counsellor who does short term solution focused therapy

Today's modern world applies so much pressure to be the perfect parent, lover and friend causing millions of new Mums and Dads to feel exhausted and subsequently unhappy. Tolerate the uncertainty of learning how to parent a child in your own way, the confidence and love for a baby isn't immediate for lots of people, but grows with time. They say that our children are our greatest teachers, your baby and you will learn and grow together, just like any other relationship. And as one midwife said to me 'I ain't seen no baby born with a handbook'.

Before a baby is born

If you have not had your baby yet here are some steps to follow that will help ease those first months

- Take time out with your partner and talk through any concerns, often it is enough to empathise with them, but sometimes you will need to put in place a plan of action. E.g. A common concern is the change in life style, not going out in the evenings, perhaps a cut in earnings. Get a piece of paper and a pen, if one problem area is lack of contact or stimulation from other adults, make a plan to fill that gap.
- Bulk cook so that you can fill the freezer, cutting down on cooking time after the baby is born
- Get a support network around you. Post natal depression has risen with the break down of community groups, and a lack of willing family members helping out in the weeks after birth. People can feel uncomfortable accepting offers of help, but allowing others to help makes them feel worthwhile and of use.
- Do as much as you can in the house to get it as you want it, even if it is just a good tidy up and clear out
- Take time out to relax so that you enter the birth with as much energy in those reserve tanks as possible
- Whilst you are resting listen to the hypnotic download that helps you mentally prepare for your baby's birth
- Talk to other Mums and find out what they did when they first had a baby
- Be aware that those first six weeks will probably be totally focussed on the baby so don't expect anything else of yourself.

So what happened to Sarah? Like most Mums who have a hard time after the birth, her story has a happy ending. She was recommended by a friend to go and see a hypnotherapist that specialised in short term solution focused therapy. It was pointed out that she was experiencing flash backs from a long and difficult birth, this formed the foundation for Kate's exhaustion and depressive symptoms.

Added to this was the normal changes that a new baby brings, she missed her friends, felt alone and could not see a way out.

After the first session where she learnt how to deeply relax, and realised that what she was experiencing was normal in the circumstances, she said that she felt seventy percent better.

At home Sarah asked her husband if he could take over the night time bath routine and he was delighted to be able to help. In that time she had a pampering bath herself and practised some of the relaxing techniques that she had been taught.

Asking old friends around to the house she eventually felt well enough to go to a new Mums and baby group, and enjoyed an evening out with her husband while the happy Grandparents looked after Rosie.

One month and two sessions later she has more energy, zest and says that she feels increasingly close to Rosie. I asked 'does she still cry?' she replied 'oh like a tap at times, but I feel relaxed and can cope now.'

NB. Post Natal Depression should not be confused with puerperal psychosis, (also called post partum psychosis or post natal psychosis) a rare but serious psychotic condition that requires urgent medical support.

The sufferer will have lost their view on reality and may hear voices or see things, a doctor may prescribe a course of drugs however the guidelines above will still play a large part in restoring health and emotional balance.

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