

Postnatal depression in your spouse

Postnatal depression: Watching for the signs

Postnatal depression is more than stress or tiredness – it lasts longer than a few days and can be a serious mental health problem. This is why it's important to watch out for the signs of postnatal depression in your spouse.

Signs might include changes in your spouse's emotions and thinking, behaviour and social life, and general physical well-being. If your spouse seems to be in a low mood or has lost interest in things she'd normally enjoy, you should take this very seriously.

Both men and women can experience postnatal depression.

Getting professional support for postnatal depression

Postnatal depression can take a long time to go away without professional help. Early professional support can help your spouse recover from postnatal depression sooner.

If the emotional changes in your spouse go on for longer than two weeks and get in the way of daily life, you need to help her get professional advice.

Some people might not want to seek help because they're worried about what other people might think. They might also want to keep up the appearance of having everything under control. These are all normal reactions. Reassure your spouse that you'll be there to support her.

There are many people and services who can help your spouse and your family with postnatal depression:

- your GP
- your obstetrician or gynae
- counselling services by local organisations
- registered psychologists

If you're worried that your spouse might hurt herself or others, you should speak urgently to your medical practitioner, take her to your local hospital's emergency department or call 995.

Tips for providing emotional support for your spouse with postnatal depression

Here are some ideas to support your spouse emotionally during this time:

- Listen and talk with her about how she's feeling and reassure her that things will get better.
- Let her know that you appreciate what a great job she's doing. You can also acknowledge that she might be tired. For example, you might say, 'Thanks for caring for our baby. I know it's hard and you're really tired, and I appreciate everything you're doing'.

- If it's taking time to learn what treatments work best for your spouse, you can reassure her that setbacks are part of the process. Make sure she knows that you'll support her as she overcomes them.
- Reassure her that her wellbeing is important to you and your family. This is especially important if she feels guilty or feels like a burden.

Tips for providing practical support to your spouse with postnatal depression

You can do a lot to help your spouse in practical ways during this time:

- Make sure you have plenty of groceries in the house and do extra baby care jobs and household chores. If you can do these things without being asked to, it means your spouse doesn't have to worry about them at all.
- Keep your spouse company. Quality couple and family time will help her recover. You can do things together like cooking meals or going for walks.
- Accept help from family and friends. You can also let people know that your family needs extra support right now and suggest what they can do to help. People often appreciate being asked for something specific.
- If you can't be there as much as you'd like, arrange for someone else to be around. It should be someone your spouse feels comfortable spending time with, like a relative or close friend.
- Help your spouse with her appointments. For example, you can arrange her appointments, drive her to appointments, go to appointments with her, arrange child care and so on.
- Do your research. The more you learn about postnatal depression, the better you'll be able to support your spouse. You can ask health professionals for more information.

Tips for looking after yourself

You might be focused on your spouse's wellbeing, but it's also important to take time for yourself as well. If you're emotionally and physically well, you'll be in better shape to support her. Here are some ideas:

- Do some physical activity – for example take your baby out for a walk in the pram. This also gives your spouse a little break – and possibly the chance to catch up on some much-needed sleep.
- Buy prepared meals, soups and salads for the days when time is short. If you have time, it's a good idea to prepare and freeze some healthy meals for the days and weeks ahead. Eating healthy food helps your spouse and you build the energy you need to care for your baby and support each other.
- Share how you're feeling with a relative, friend or health professional if you need to.