

Perinatal mental health

Information for
women and families



Public Health
Agency

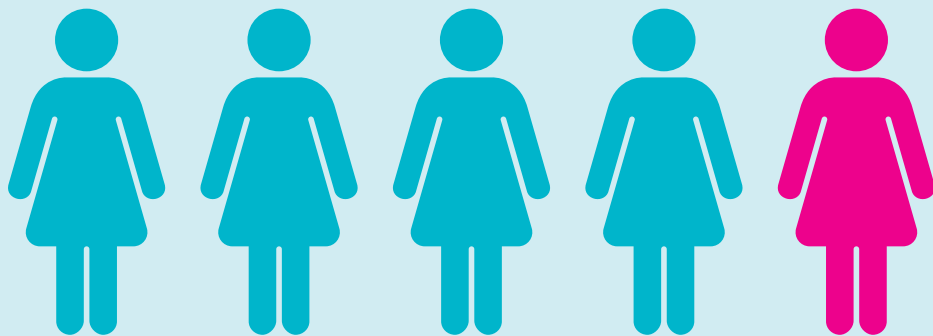
Having a child is a big life event, and it's natural to experience a range of emotions and reactions during and after your pregnancy. But if these emotions start to have a negative impact on your daily life, you might be experiencing a perinatal mental health problem.

If this happens to you there is help available.

What is perinatal mental health?

The 'perinatal period' is the name given to the period during pregnancy and up to one year after birth.

Around one in five women will experience a mental health problem during the perinatal period.



Some perinatal mental health problems include:

- perinatal anxiety;
- perinatal depression;
- perinatal obsessive-compulsive disorder;
- perinatal post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD);
- postpartum psychosis.

This might be a new issue or something you have experienced before. The majority of women will experience mild to moderate symptoms and can be helped with increased support from family, maternity services and primary care services like GPs, health visitors and community and voluntary support and advocacy services. Some may experience more serious illnesses.

Early intervention and treatment of perinatal mental health problems is essential and is not only beneficial for the woman but also for the future health and wellbeing of her child and for the family as a whole.



It can be really difficult to talk openly about how you're feeling when you become a parent. You might feel:

- pressure to be happy and excited
- you have to be on top of everything
- worried you're failing as a parent if you're struggling with your mental health
- worried what might happen if you admit how you're feeling

Who can develop a perinatal mental health problem?

Women can develop perinatal mental health problems at any time, no matter what age you are or how many pregnancies you have had.

The majority of women are managed by their GP, health visitor and/or midwife, including those with mild to moderate depression, anxiety and other conditions. They may not require medication and will often respond to psychological and/or social support.

Women with more significant illness may require medication only or medication with the addition of psychological and social support.



Why are some women referred to the perinatal mental health team?

There are two groups of women who require care and treatment from perinatal mental health teams.

1. Women with a pre-existing mental health problem (such as bipolar disorder or previous postpartum psychosis). These women, although currently well, are considered to be at risk of relapse or recurrence of their illness in pregnancy or, more commonly, the postnatal period.

Pre-pregnancy counselling can be provided by the perinatal mental health team and individual care plans can be put in place.

2. Women who develop a significant episode of illness in association with the perinatal period. A number of these women may present with rapidly deteriorating illness, requiring urgent assessment by mental health services, particularly if they present within the first six weeks postnatal.

Do you need to be referred to the Perinatal Mental Health Team?



Yes

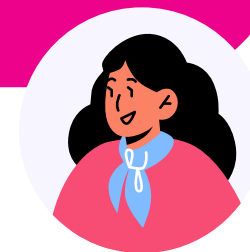
1. Referral to perinatal mental health team is made
2. The perinatal mental health team carry out an assessment

No

Other options might be appropriate:

- Onward referral to other mental health services
- Specialist midwifery clinic for enhanced care
- Psychology referral
- Health visitor (if more than 24 weeks gestation)
- Community and voluntary sector
- Self-help resources

"My health visitor really was an asset to me both during my second pregnancy with signposting me to different organisations that could offer me more support in regards to finances and my mental health and in my last pregnancy when I was now raising my girls on my own, she was able to help with advice in regards to my daughters milk allergy...she's someone who has brought me ample support, kindness and zero judgements."



Who are the perinatal mental health team?

- Psychiatrist
- Lead obstetrician
- Psychiatric nurse
- Psychologist
- Mental health social worker
- Parent-infant psychotherapist
- Occupational therapists
- Midwife
- Health visitor



This team is a multidisciplinary group of professionals.

They have training and expertise in delivering care to women experiencing mental illness in the perinatal period.

The team take referrals from a range of other professionals, including maternity staff, and see women with established illness but also those women at risk of developing serious illness due to pregnancy and childbirth.



"I cannot speak highly enough of the care and support I received from the perinatal mental health team. They provided me with care, compassion, support and guidance through two of my three pregnancies and without them things would have been a lot different."



Think Family

"When I was told social services were coming to see my family I had thought they were going to separate my family, but the social worker told me that they didn't want to separate families, they were there to keep my family together."



The ethos of the health service is embedded in the Think Family approach. The three main themes of Think Family are:

- improve communication and information sharing between professionals and families;
- improve access to early intervention family support for children, young people and their families;
- improve the extent to which assessment, planning and treatment is inclusive of a 'whole family' approach.

You can find out more about Think Family at pha.site/think-family

Who will my information be shared with and why?

Health services gather and record personal information for the purpose of providing safe and effective health and social care. Information will be stored securely and shared with others in the multi-disciplinary team for the purpose of understanding the challenges the service user is facing and to develop care and treatment programmes to meet the individual's specific needs.

Consent will be sought to share information with anyone outside of the services, with an explanation about what information is to be shared, why, and what the benefits are.

Personal information will only be shared without consent where there is a legal obligation to do so and/or where it is considered necessary for the safety of the woman and/or her child.



What do mothers who have used the service say?

"The advice I would give to new and expectant mums would be just go with it and trust yourself. Trust your gut and your own mum instinct. Also please ask for help because we aren't superhuman."



"The MAs project has helped to bring back the old me, the me before my antenatal and postnatal depression and anxiety took over my life. MAs has provided me with peer support enabling me to develop and grow new friendships, it's provided a listening ear in my hours of need and has given me the confidence to gain back my voice along with providing me with opportunities and opening new doors for me to help and support other mothers something I am very passionate about. The MAs project has been my life line."



Information on community and voluntary services who work with women with perinatal mental health problems can be found at www.publichealth.hscni.net/perinatal-mental-health-services





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Find us on:

