



WHAT IS POSTNATAL DEPRESSION?



Postnatal depression is the name given to depression that develops between one month and up to one year after the birth of a baby. Pre-natal and post-natal depression affects about 1 in every 3 women who give birth in South Africa each year (Van Niekerk et al., 2017, p. 10). Dads are also known to have postnatal depression – so please look out for this in dad too.

It's important that mom (and dad) are aware of the signs of postnatal depression and seek help if they are not coping. All parents go through a period of adjustment as they try to handle the huge changes a baby brings. For most people, this time of adjustment will be temporary and will not be overly distressing.

Many women experience the **'baby blues'** in the first few days after having a baby. The baby blues usually only last 2 to 3 days and you might feel teary, anxious and moody during that time. The support of a partner, family and friends is usually enough to help mom get through it. When these feelings last beyond these early days and continue to get worse, it may be a sign of developing depression. There are also other mental health conditions that can develop during pregnancy and after birth that mom should seek professional support for.

SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF POSTNATAL DEPRESSION

If you think mom is depressed, encourage her to talk about her feelings to you, a friend, or her health care provider. There are many signs that mom may be struggling with postnatal depression. Some of the more common ones include:

- having a very low mood
- frequent crying for no obvious reason
- feeling inadequate and a failure as a mother
- having difficulty bonding with their baby, looking after them only as a duty and not wanting to play with them
- constantly worrying that something is wrong with their baby, regardless of reassurance
- having a sense of hopelessness about the future
- feeling exhausted, empty, sad, and teary
- feeling guilty, ashamed, or worthless
- feeling anxious or panicky
- having trouble sleeping, sleep for too long or have nightmares
- feeling scared of being alone or going out
- withdrawing from contact with other people
- speaking negatively all the time and claiming that they are hopeless
- neglecting themselves, such as not washing or changing their clothes
- losing all sense of time, such as being unaware whether 10 minutes or 2 hours have passed
- losing their sense of humour

In some cases, mom may experience thoughts about leaving her family or worried that her partner may leave her. She could also have ideas about self-harm or doing harm to her partner or baby. It is also common for mom to experience symptoms of anxiety at the same time as depression. These symptoms/signs can affect moms day-to-day life and relationship with her baby, family and friends. In situations like this, mom should seek professional help straight away. **REFER** mom for help if she does not know where to go (e.g. SADAG or local services)

Fathers and partners can also become depressed after the birth of a baby, and should also seek help.

HOW IS POSTNATAL DEPRESSION DIAGNOSED?

If mom has had any of these symptoms for 2 weeks or more, she must talk to her doctor or midwife. Mom can also visit her local clinic or look for an organisation offering mental health services. Postnatal depression needs to be properly diagnosed and managed by a trained healthcare professional.

EDINBURGH POSTNATAL DEPRESSION SCALE

The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) is a questionnaire that asks about mom's feelings and symptoms. The EPDS indicates whether she may have some symptoms that are common with depression and anxiety. Do an [online questionnaire](#) to see if mom has postnatal depression.

TREATING POSTNATAL DEPRESSION

A range of different treatments can help with postnatal depression, including:

- counselling
- psychotherapy
- group treatment
- support strategies
- medications such as antidepressants
- support from family and friends is also important

USEFUL LINKS FOR INFORMATION AND REFERRALS

- [The South African Depression and Anxiety Group \(SADAG\)](#) is a useful website and you can send mom's name and telephone number on the online chat option for a counsellor to call mom for free. Or mom can **SMS 31393 or 32312** and a counsellor will call her back – available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Or mom can call the **SADAG Helplines 0800 212 223, 0800 708 090 or 0800 456 789** or the **Suicide Helpline 0800 567 567** which provides free telephonic counselling, information, referrals and resources 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. There is also a Facebook Page that has FREE online [#Facebook Expert Chats](#) daily, between 1pm – 2pm. Please be sure that mom agrees for you to give her number to SADAG.
- **Cipla Whatsapp Chat Line 076 882 2775** to chat online with a counsellor 7 days a week from 9am – 4pm.
- [Cape Mental Health](#) provide a range of community-based services for persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. Services include assessment, referral, counselling and support.
- For more information, [here](#) is an interesting article about postnatal depression.
- [Useful contacts](#) resource has a range of agencies and services to refer mom or dad to, should you be concerned about her/him or baby.

The above information is adapted from:

- <https://www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/postnatal-depression>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/post-natal-depression/symptoms/>