



In each issue of The Point, we look at one of the most common queries received by the SAMH Information Service.

Q. I am pregnant and I'm afraid that I will suffer from postnatal depression. Will I?

A. Pregnancy can be a joyous time for many women, a time where they can anticipate the months ahead, enjoy the experience and prepare for childbirth. But being pregnant can also be an anxious time, especially for first time mums. There are also factors that have to be taken into consideration for the woman, ranging from bodily to lifestyle to practical changes, which can be scary and exciting at the same time. From the start of the pregnancy there are things that worry mums-to-be: first scans, tests, keeping well.

A lot of hormonal changes are going on and it is easy to become overwhelmed by everything that is happening. For some women, that can start to have a detrimental effect on their mental health.

Some women can start to experience psychological changes during their pregnancy, which can lead to problems such as mood swings, anxiety or depression. It's important to understand that these are not uncommon at all during pregnancy and usually do not last long. Contact your mid-wife or GP for advice and support.

In the first few weeks after giving birth, new mums are monitored by their health visitors during home visits. Between 6-8 weeks after the birth, you will be asked a series of questions to check for any problems. If anything is flagged up the health visitor will follow this up, and will normally repeat the test at the 3 month point. If at any time the health visitor feels you are at risk of becoming unwell they would normally refer you to the GP.

There are several different types of mental health problems that are specifically associated with pregnancy and childbirth:

- Antenatal Depression
- Postnatal depression
- Puerperal Psychosis

Antidepressants can be prescribed but if you are breastfeeding there are certain drugs which you will not be allowed to take. You might also be referred for talking therapies or to a psychiatrist.

In rare cases (about 1 in 500 births); the mother will become ill suddenly with what is called puerperal psychosis. This is a serious condition and the symptoms usually develop quickly, sometimes a few days after the birth.

A woman with puerperal psychosis may become over-active, unable to sleep, irritable, or depressed, and may hear voices or have delusions. Women with bipolar disorder may be at increased risk of developing puerperal psychosis.

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Antenatal depression may involve symptoms such as irritability/mood swings, tearfulness, worrying, anxiety or sleeplessness. If antenatal depression is diagnosed, you would usually be referred to a specialist such as a perinatal psychiatrist and may be prescribed medication.

Postnatal Depression is more common, with symptoms affecting at least 11,000 women in Scotland each year – that's 10-15% of all mothers. The symptoms can be similar to those of antenatal depression. Some women who experience postnatal depression report feeling useless, alone, unable to cope or care for their baby or not caring about anything.

You may find some of the following contacts useful:

Bluebell Campaign

www.bluebellday.org.uk
Telephone: 0800 3 457 457

The Association for Post Natal Illness

www.apni.org
Telephone: 0207 386 0868

The National Childbirth Trust

www.nctpregnancyandbabycare.com
Telephone: 0870 444 8707

Breathing Space

www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk
Telephone: 0800 83 85 87