

# UK researchers rank best online advice for postnatal depression

February 7 2012



(Medical Xpress) -- Researchers at the University of Sussex have identified the top five internet sites offering support for women struggling with postnatal mental illness such as depression or anxiety.

Around 10-15 per cent of new mothers are diagnosed with postnatal mental illnesses, while around one in four women may have significant post-birth distress without meeting the criteria for a disorder. Many women turn to the internet to seek advice and reassurance over these conditions.

Health psychologists Donna Moore and Dr. Susan Ayers sorted through thousands of web sites and whittled down their selection to the top five

sites for [new mothers](#) seeking [information](#) about [postnatal depression](#) and [anxiety](#) and the top five for healthcare professionals looking for ways to support patients.

For mums they are:

[www.panda.org.au](http://www.panda.org.au)

[www.hapis.org.uk](http://www.hapis.org.uk)

[www.postpartumhealthalliance.org](http://www.postpartumhealthalliance.org)

[www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net)

[www.pndsa.co.za](http://www.pndsa.co.za)

And for health professionals:

[www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net)

[www.postpartumhealthalliance.org](http://www.postpartumhealthalliance.org)

[www.babybluesconnection.org](http://www.babybluesconnection.org)

[www.postpartumsupport.com](http://www.postpartumsupport.com)

[www.postpartumeducationandsupport.com](http://www.postpartumeducationandsupport.com) ;

The research, published in the journal *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, offers the latest systematic survey of web advice for postnatal psychological problems and serves as an authoritative guide to most reliable sites.

Women can suffer from various psychological problems after having a baby that range from mild baby blues to more severe depression, anxiety and psychosis. The researchers found that although there were thousands of sites devoted to postnatal depression (typing “postnatal depression” into Google returned more than a million results), the quality was extremely variable, with very few sites offering the full spectrum of easily accessed support, advice, information and reassurance about the different psychological problems women might encounter.

Many sites were hard to navigate, suffered from poorly edited content or had information that was out of date or just plain wrong. Information focused on symptoms rather than risk factors or the potential negative impact of not dealing with the illness on children and families as well as the sufferer. There was some information on treatment, but it was generally superficial.

Most websites rarely had prominent information on what the users should do if they have thoughts of harming themselves or their infant.

Donna Moore says: “Most web sites did encourage women to seek medical help. However, information tended to be about depressive symptoms and largely ignored other forms of postnatal illness, namely anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder and puerperal psychosis. This could reinforce the common misconception that postnatal mental illness is solely depression or simply an extension of the ‘baby blues’. Mothers need to know what the signs of the illness are and treatment options and [health professionals](#) need to know all the facts for effective screening. It is essential that web sites provide accurate and comprehensive information and advice for mothers and their families. Mothers need to be informed that if they get help they will get better.”

Dr. Ayers says:”The internet is often the first port of call for people worried about health issues. This is particularly the case for women suffering from depressive illness following the birth of a baby because they many find it difficult to leave the house with a young infant and, like all mental health issues, there is the fear of being stigmatised. Using the internet, therefore, provides a way of seeking reassurance, information and advice anonymously from home. Effective web sites are therefore important in directing women to the professional help they need while giving them the confidence to ask for it.”

To identify the best sites, the researchers searched for sites using the

four main search engines using the terms “postnatal depression”, “postnatal illness”, “postpartum [depression](#)” and “postpartum illness”. The first 25 web sites for each key term were selected for review.

Each site had to be exclusively dedicated to postnatal mental health or have substantial information on postnatal mental illness. They were evaluated for accuracy of information, available resources and quality. A total of 114 sites were eventually surveyed.

It is hoped that through this systematic review, the top web sites will be used by healthcare professionals and help with the creation of new online resources, based on knowledge of how sufferers use web resources. Donna Moore and Susan Ayers are currently investigating how women with postnatal distress use and benefit from resources on the internet.

Accurate information on all symptoms is essential for [healthcare professionals](#) screening for postnatal [mental illness](#) and sufferers and their families deciding whether to get help.

**More information:** A review of postnatal mental health websites: help for healthcare professionals and patients, *Archives of Women’s Mental Health*.

Provided by University of Sussex

Citation: UK researchers rank best online advice for postnatal depression (2012, February 7) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-02-uk-online-advice-postnatal-depression.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.