

Postnatal depression: What new fathers need to know—and how to ask for help

June 5 2023, by Andrew Mayers



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Many people think of postnatal depression as a condition that only affects women. But in reality, postnatal depression affects [almost as many men as women](#)—with some research estimating it occurs in up to [10% of fathers](#).

Yet despite how common [postnatal depression](#) may be in men, there still isn't very much information out there about it. This can make it hard to know if you may have postnatal depression—and how to get help if you do.

Here's what you need to know.

Why it happens

There are many reasons why postnatal depression happens. And, contrary to popular belief, it isn't just due to hormones. Even in women, hormones only [play a small role](#) in postnatal depression.

Instead, postnatal depression is typically due to a [combination of risk factors](#)—such as a previous history of depression, [sleep problems](#) after the baby is born, lack of social support or financial challenges. Postnatal depression can also [happen at any age](#).

The symptoms of postnatal depression are quite similar to symptoms of depression. As such, [symptoms of postnatal depression](#) may include low mood, lack of motivation, [poor sleep](#), feeling guilty or worthless, poor concentration, changes in appetite or weight, fatigue and thoughts of death or suicide.

The main difference between depression and postnatal depression is that these feelings tend to happen in the postnatal period (typically the first year or so after the baby is born).

It can be normal to struggle with your mental health somewhat after your baby is born. After all, it can be an overwhelming and emotional time, with nearly every aspect of your life changing—from your [daily routine](#), your relationship with your partner, to the amount of sleep you get every night.

But if you've been experiencing low mood and lack of motivation for more than a few weeks, and are finding these feelings are making it difficult to engage with your infant, you may want to consider speaking with your GP or a mental health professional. It's also worth noting that postnatal depression can happen at any time in the first year or two after the baby is born—not just in the early months.

Getting help

Postnatal depression is not likely to go away on its own. If you suspect you may be struggling with postnatal depression, it's important to seek support—not only for your well-being, but because postnatal depression can also affect your bond [with your baby](#).

First of all, there's [nothing wrong with needing help](#), and seeking support—either from loved ones, friends or a doctor—is nothing to be [embarrassed by](#). It does not [make you weak](#), nor does experiencing postnatal depression make you a "[failure](#)".

While it can be difficult to know how to take the first step in getting support, a good starting point is simply acknowledging that this is a difficult thing to talk about. As simple as this sounds, it may just help you feel less awkward about sharing your experiences when you do speak to someone. It's also worth remembering that when you do speak to someone, it's important to say how you really feel—not what you feel you should say.

It's also [normal if you feel angry](#) about feeling the way you do. Many young men who struggle with their mental health feel angry that they feel this way, or worry that they've let their loved ones down or that the system will not listen to them. To deal with that anger, be patient. Try to let the anger go—it may help you feel more at ease opening up about your other emotions.

You may also find it easier to talk about your experiences in certain settings. For example, while some people may find it easier to speak with their GP or in online chat groups, you may find it more comfortable to speak up in a less formal setting—such as while watching sports with friends. You can begin this conversation with something as simple as asking how others are doing, before sharing your own feelings and experiences. Or, if your friends are also parents themselves, you might ask if any of them experienced similar feelings during the postnatal period.

If you're finding it hard to speak to loved ones, you could also consider using a [mental health](#) app. Some people find it easier to use an app to ask questions, find solutions and discuss how they're feeling. Apps such as [DadPad](#) have a number of resources that can help you navigate fatherhood.

Postnatal [depression](#) in fathers is real and it does matter. Fortunately, compared to just a few years ago, there's more awareness and help available than ever before.

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