

## Dads count too! ... Information for Fathers

Fathers are often overlooked and forgotten about when their baby arrives into the world. Mothers and babies tend to receive lots of input and are regularly assessed and checked to ensure their health and safety. *But what about the Dads??* Until recently, Post Natal Depression was thought to affect females only. However, with an increasing awareness of mental health, it is now estimated that between 4% and 10% of new Fathers may also be affected by this condition.

### Causes of PND in Fathers

There is little current research in this area. However, there are some factors, which are thought to affect the likelihood of Fathers experiencing depression:

- Other concerns in life, e.g. financial worries, employment.
- Marriage or relationship problems
- Physical health problems
- Feeling of isolation, no family or friends to help out
- Being an older father
- Being a new father
- Having a partner with PND
- Previous history of mental health difficulties

### How it affects men

- You may feel a sense of loss as well as gain
- Feeling overwhelmed, isolated and confused by your feelings and your partner's reactions to them also.
- You may be less likely to interact with your babies/children, playing, reading and talking.
- Irritability, aggression and hostility
- Not enjoying anything
- Poor concentration/memory
- Poor appetite, or overeating
- Seeing the future in a bleak way, feeling that things are unlikely to get better
- Finding it hard to cope with the changes to lifestyle and routines
- Having to come to terms with Fatherhood, the emotional and physical changes it brings and the sense of responsibility.
- Feeling under pressure, being concerned about other factors, e.g. finances
- Having thoughts/feelings of inadequacy, not good enough, not ready to be a father, not deserving of their child(ren).

As with any mental health difficulty, Post Natal Depression can often be well hidden from the outside world and not openly discussed with others. Having a baby is a joyful event for many. However, it may also bring about a time of change and responsibility, which may feel frightening or difficult to cope with. This may be especially valid when Fathers feel excluded or alienated from any discussions or simple questions about how they are doing.

Many Fathers feel pressured by the overwhelming sense of responsibility and demands that a baby places on them. The expectations of being “the perfect father” and “being there for your partner throughout the ups and the downs” may be a source of additional stress. The transition to Fatherhood can be filled with obstacles and unexpected events along the way, such as loss of libido (for either party), medical problems, traumatic births, decisions/disagreements about the child, financial problems, loss and tiredness/exhaustion.

Relationships can also be hugely affected. Men might not feel as close to their partner during the pregnancy or after the birth, with much of the attention being placed on the baby. This may also affect the amount of effective communication that takes place within the relationship. There might be underlying problems within the relationship that have been bubbling away and become more apparent as time goes on.

### **So what can help?**

- Talking to others – partner, friends, other Dads, family members, health care professionals (such as GP, health visitor). Don't ignore your feelings...
- Keeping physically active / exercise.
- Avoiding alcohol or illicit substances, as these do not help in the longer term.
- Having social support, taking up people's offers of help.
- Finding time to do things you find enjoyable – these might be things you like to do alone, with your partner, or with your child.
- Problem solving any areas of your life that are causing stress if possible, e.g. work, finances.
- Attend local support groups, online groups or engage in any form of support for Fathers.
- Consider seeing a counsellor or Cognitive Behavioural Therapist for psychological support.

Information sourced from:

<http://babyworld.co.uk/2011/05/depressed-dads/>

<http://www.dad.info/health/your-health/post-natal-depression-dads>

<http://www.netmums.com/support/depression-and-anxiety/postnatal-depression/partners-supporting-suffering-mums/fathers-who-suffer-from-pnd>

*Family Wellbeing Workshop  
Information Sheet 7*