



Post & Ante Natal Depression  
Support & Information Inc.



What is perinatal anxiety  
and depression?

# Pathway to wellness

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## What is Perinatal Anxiety and Depression?

Pregnancy is a time of great change and many expectations. It can also bring on feelings of uncertainty and worry around being a new parent and how you will adapt to your new role. When these feelings persist, it is not uncommon to experience anxiety and/or depression. This is known as **antenatal anxiety and depression** and it can affect up to 1 in 10 mothers.

**Postnatal anxiety and depression** usually occurs anytime in the 12 months following the birth of a baby. Adjustment to parenting may be challenging for many parents, however if you are experiencing overwhelming worry which

is negatively affecting your life every day, it could be postnatal depression. Postnatal depression is not uncommon. It is a mood disorder affecting up to 1 in 7 women and 1 in 20 men. It is important to recognise that nobody is to “blame” for your feelings and that it is ok to reach out for support.

Collectively, postnatal and antenatal depression and anxiety are known as **perinatal depression and anxiety**.

### **Is it PND, Baby Blues or Postnatal (Puerperal) Psychosis?**

The “baby blues” affects up to 80% of women, usually between the 3rd and

10th day after giving birth. Women may feel tearful and overwhelmed. This usually passes within a few days.

Sometimes however, these feelings do not pass and further support and medical intervention may be required if you develop postnatal depression (PND). Symptoms of postnatal depression can be mild, moderate or severe.

## Are you at risk of perinatal anxiety and/or depression?

If you have a personal or family history of depression or psychological illness you may be at greater risk, however perinatal depression can affect anyone. Lack of family and social support can be a contributor to perinatal anxiety and depression. Other contributing factors can include:

- *An unwanted pregnancy*
- *Difficulty getting pregnant or fertility treatment*
- *Previous miscarriage, termination or stillbirth*
- *Health complications during pregnancy*
- *Childhood trauma/abuse*
- *Traumatic birthing experience/the birth did not go as planned*
- *You and/or your baby are unwell*
- *Challenged by change of identity e.g. career woman to mother*
- *Having trouble adjusting to parenthood*
- *Inability to breastfeed (if desired)*

Postnatal psychosis is a severe mental illness which affects 1 to 2 women in 1000 after the birth of a baby. It is characterised by severe thought disturbances, abnormal behaviour, hallucinations, confusion and loss of contact with reality. This is a medical emergency and a doctor should be consulted immediately.

- *Financial stress*
- *Having a premature baby*
- *Being isolated/lack of support*



## **Signs and symptoms to look out for include:**

- *Insomnia*
- *Significant changes in appetite and sleep patterns*
- *Lack of concentration*
- *Uncontrollable crying*
- *Obsessive behaviour such as cleaning, walking, or pacing*
- *Inability to cope with day to day routines*
- *Isolating yourself from others*
- *Irrational thoughts*
- *Blaming yourself for things that seem wrong*
- *Fear of being alone or going out*
- *Wanting to run away*
- *Fear of harm coming to your partner or your baby*
- *Negative or morbid thoughts*
- *Thoughts of suicide*
- *Feelings of guilt, shame or worthlessness*
- *Extended periods of feeling sad*
- *Mood swings*
- *Feeling pessimistic and bleak about the future*
- *High levels of anxiety or panic*
- *Feeling unusually irritable and impatient*
- *Feeling low or flat*
- *Prolonged feelings of anger towards yourself, your partner or your baby*
- *Feeling numb, empty and despondent*
- *Masking your feelings*





## How can PANDSI help you?

PANDSI provides support, information and appropriate referral services to women and their families who are affected by mild to moderate perinatal anxiety and depression. We help dads as well as mums and aim to help reduce negative outcomes associated with perinatal mental health conditions and build resilience in families. We can help you to realise that some of your feelings are a normal part of parenthood and you will find lots of strategies for managing your expectations and experiences.

Through our Pathway to Wellness we can offer a range of services including telephone support, day support groups, exercise and yoga support groups, individual support, partners' information evening and a playgroup. PANDSI clients also have access to our library.

Our support groups provide a nurturing and safe environment where you are able to share your experiences without judgement or criticism, amongst others who understand. We provide free adjunct

childcare during most groups so that you are able to focus on yourself, knowing that your baby is being well looked after on the premises.

We encourage you to call us and speak to an experienced support worker who will ascertain the suitability of our programs to your needs, discuss the programs available to you and take you through the next steps of engaging with the service. You do not need a referral to PANDSI, just pick up the phone.

## Your Pathway to Wellness

### Who can help me?

Many supports are available and the PANDSI support workers are able to refer you to many other organisations that may be of help. We also advocate that you see your general practitioner.

Other places to seek help are:

- MACH nurse (Maternal and Child Health Nurse)
- General Practitioner
- Midwife
- Crisis Assessment & Treatment Team (CATT) 1800 629 354
- Perinatal Mental Health Consultation Service 02 6205 1469
- Psychologist or psychiatrist
- Social worker
- Obstetrician
- Child, Youth and Women's Health Program- Community Health Intake Line 6207 9977
- Child and Family Centres
- Your partner, family and friends



### What can help me?

Help can be in the form of psychological support, social support, lifestyle changes and in some cases medication.

Treatment may include:

- Various forms of therapy including psychotherapy and/or trauma therapy
- Counselling
- Medication
- Speaking to a support worker
- Lowering expectations of yourself and others
- Exercise and balanced diet
- Sleep
- Time out for self-care
- Support from family and friends
- Support groups
- Alternative therapies

## About PANDSI

PANDSI is an incorporated community based non-government organisation providing support to families in the Australian Capital Territory. Primarily funded by ACT Health, it is staffed by experienced, non-clinical support workers and administration staff.

## Our mission

To provide evidence based, innovative early intervention support and information to help families understand their perinatal mental health, normalise their experiences and build resilience. To assist families on their pathway to recovery, work with the community to reduce stigma and benefit the wider society.

## Our Vision

To improve the perinatal mental health of women, men and their families in the ACT.

## Our Values

Respect, Resilience, Diversity, Acceptance, Integrity

## Client Testimonials

*"I can't thank PANDSI enough for the help they've given me. Getting PND was the first time I'd experienced any mental health issue in my life and it hit me like a brick! It was the hardest time in my life, and for a long time PANDSI was the only support I felt I had. It's a fantastic organisation".*

*"I don't know where I'd be without PANDSI. Without sounding too melodramatic, you saved me and you therefore saved my family. PANDSI was where I rediscovered my own strength & worth and it was a place where I found friends who took over where PANDSI left off. It was what I leaned heavily on when I had no one else to prop me up."*

## *A message from our Patron - Senator Katy Gallagher*

Postnatal depression is a serious health issue in our community. While the journey through pregnancy, childbirth and new parenthood is most often full of joy, around one in seven women will experience some level of post or antenatal depression.

As awareness and understanding of postnatal depression have grown – driven in large part by the advocacy of organisations such as PANDSI – we have come to better understand the need to provide support and care for women who experience this illness. This includes access to appropriate counselling and health care, professional and peer support, and an overarching health network which caters to the diversity of individual needs in the community.

PANDSI plays a crucial role in supporting people across our region who are affected by post or antenatal depression and it's a privilege for me to continue my close association with PANDSI as patron.

Senator  
*Katy Gallagher*  
Patron of PANDSI



PANDSI Canberra

Disclaimer: The information provided in this booklet is purely for guidance and not intended to replace medical advice or treatment. If you believe you may have any of the illnesses mentioned, or if you have any concerns about medication, it is essential that you seek appropriate help from a qualified practitioner.

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See our website for details

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