

Fathers and Depression after the Birth of Their Baby

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<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=438&np=464&id=3002>

Fathers adjusting to parenthood

When a baby comes along it can turn your world upside down. It is wonderful and exciting to have a baby but also a lot of extra work.

- Your relationship with your partner has changed and the routine you had before is now not possible.
- You may feel inadequate about knowing how to care for the baby and support your partner.
- Getting enough sleep may be difficult for you and your partner and this can lead to tension.
- Your finances may be an issue now with only one income coming in and more expenses.
- If you were not sure that you really wanted a baby at this time you may be feeling left out.
- You may feel a great pressure to do lots at home and also do well at work.

Whatever you feel we know that you need support in becoming a father.

Where do you get your support from? It is good to talk to family or friends about how you are going but most important is to talk with your partner. Hopefully she will be your main support just the same as you are for her.

Some fathers may suffer depression after their baby is born

You will probably have highs and lows as a new father. However we know that up to 10% of fathers are depressed after their baby is born, but often they do not seek help. Men often do not talk about their feelings, so they may not know that many other fathers are also depressed.

Some of the things you might experience if you are depressed include:

- Decreased energy
- Increased anxiety
- Decreased enjoyment of life
- Problems at work
- Negative mood: feeling miserable, grumpy or sad
- Increased drinking or smoking
- Inability to enjoy the baby
- Feeling of angry with your baby or your partner
- Feeling left out and alone.

Your friends or work mates might notice you are low.

It is tough for many fathers to ask for help because they think they should be able to cope. However it shows great strength to recognize when you have a problem and get help rather than ignore it. So if you are feeling low and not coping with things over a period of more than 2 weeks you should see your doctor and talk to your partner and other people who might be able to support you. Sometimes there are counselors in workplaces who are able to support people about family and personal issues, not only work issues.

Why is treatment and positive action so important?

There can be several problems if depression is not treated.

- A father suffering depression may feel ashamed and isolated as it is supposed to be a happy time in their life and hard to talk about.
- Fathers may have unnecessary on-going mental suffering, including the possibility of self-harm such as drinking too much or even suicide.
- Depression often causes big strains on your relationship, which can lead to conflict and separation.
- Many studies also show that there may be effects of a parent's depression on their baby.
 - Babies learn many things in the first 12 months of life.
 - They learn more when their parents have energy and time for them, and when the quality of the relationship is strong.
 - It takes a lot of energy to 'tune in' to your baby all the time - even well parents can't tune in ALL the time – no one is a perfect parent.

But young babies are very adaptable, and if one parent has been depressed for a while the other parent can support their baby. And when the parent who has been depressed is feeling better their baby may make up for lost time. But the sooner you get treatment, the better it is likely to be.

Remember:

- Depression is very common, and it is treatable.
- It takes a lot of strength for many men to ask for help when they are not coping.
- A father is not 'weak' because he is suffering post natal depression. It is not the fault of the parent, and has not happened because he can't 'pull himself together'.
- People who are depressed usually feel better eventually, but it can take a long time to be back to normal, and there can be a big strain on your relationship with your partner and your baby for many months.
- Everyone tries the best they can and parents want to do the right thing by their babies, but post natal depression may stop them doing so.

How fathers can support their partner who has PND

Postnatal depression (PND) is depression that a woman experiences in the months after the birth of her baby. Postnatal depression is very common and affects almost 1 in 6 women in Australia (15%).

Postnatal depression is not something you or your partner caused, and her being angry or irritable with you is part of the illness.

Things that you can do that may help include:

- Try to understand her feelings. Even though it does not seem reasonable to you, it is real for her at the time.
- Don't take her irritation or anger with you personally.
- Let your family and friends know what is happening. Support from those close to you will be a big help at this time.
- Accept help from family and friends even if you don't really like doing so.
- Give her practical support and spend time with your baby but do not take over her role unless she really can't cope.
- If she is getting help be patient with her while she gets better.

Things that won't help your partner are telling her:

- To 'pull herself together'
- To be grateful that she has a lovely baby
- That she will get through it, everyone feels bad sometimes
- To relax and she will feel better.

If your partner is suffering we know it can be very hard for partners to keep coming home to an unhappy house but it is important to hang in there - getting better will take time.

Resources and more about depression for men:

- Beyond Blue Resources
http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=7.980#Family
 - [Depression in men](#)
- Black Dog Institute
<http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/index.cfm> Fathers and PND