

Perinatal Depression: Fact Sheet

What is perinatal depression?

Perinatal depression is a common mental illness that affects your mood. It occurs during pregnancy and/or within one year of childbirth. It can also impact your entire family, including your partner, baby and other children. Too often, perinatal depression is not recognized and the person does not get the care or support they need and would benefit from. Fortunately, there are many ways to get better and recover.



What are symptoms of perinatal depression?

Depression symptoms are different for each person. They may start anytime during pregnancy or postpartum, although a common start time is the first four to six weeks after childbirth. Examples of perinatal depression symptoms include:

- Sadness or tearfulness
- Loss of interest or pleasure
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- Feeling guilty
- Difficulties with decision-making
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- Worrying a lot
- Mood swings
- Anxiety
- Self-doubt
- Low self-esteem
- Hopelessness
- Low energy
- Fear of being alone with the baby

What are some risk factors for perinatal depression?

Many factors including biology or stressful life events can increase a person's risk of perinatal depression. Other risk factors can include:

- A history of depression or anxiety
- Struggles with low self-esteem
- Difficult life events like losing a loved one or a break up
- A pregnancy loss or a challenging birth
- A lack of support from family or friends
- Experiences of abuse either currently or during childhood

What can I do if I think I may have perinatal depression?

If you think you may have perinatal depression, seek help as soon as possible.

- Remember – you are not alone. Talk to someone you trust. With support and care, you can feel better.
- Try and take it one day at a time. Focus on taking the best care of yourself possible. Eat healthy food, get rest when you can and have some time for yourself each day.
- Ask supportive friends and family members for their help with practical tasks like housework.
- **If you are having any thoughts of self-harm or suicide, seek help immediately. Call your partner, a family member, friend, a nurse or another health-care provider. If it is an emergency, call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest hospital.**

How can my nurse or another health-care provider determine if I have perinatal depression and help me get better?

- You will be asked to complete a mental health screening for perinatal depression.
- The screening will show if you are at a higher risk of having depression or not.
- If your results show that you are at a higher risk, you will be offered a more detailed assessment. This will help to confirm if you do or do not have perinatal depression.
- If you have perinatal depression, your nurse or another health-care provider will work with you to develop a follow-up plan, including treatment options.



What treatment options might help me if I have been diagnosed with perinatal depression?

- Treatment options depend on your preferences, goals, symptoms and mental health services and supports available in your area.
- Your nurse or another health-care provider can help you to understand your options and provide access to the supports and resources that are most suited for you.
- Counselling is often recommended, especially for someone with mild or moderate symptoms. Counselling can also help someone with severe symptoms when combined with medication.
- Any decisions regarding treatment options must include a discussion of harms and benefits. This is especially important if you are currently pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Throughout treatment, your symptoms should be re-assessed to determine your progress and plan for next steps.