Perinatal depression and anxiety in one page

What it is

What is perinatal depression and anxiety?

Perinatal depression and anxiety are mental health conditions that start while you are expecting a baby or in the year after the birth. They are common, either parent can have them, and they last longer than the baby blues.

- It starts before the birth or in the first year
- It is common in new mothers
- Fathers and partners can get perinatal depression

The signs

What are the symptoms of perinatal depression and anxiety?

Common signs are feeling low, numb or hopeless, constant worry about the baby, feeling on edge or panicky, losing interest in things you used to enjoy, sleep and appetite changes, and trouble concentrating. Signs that last longer than 2 weeks are worth raising.

- Feeling low, numb or hopeless is a common sign
- Constant worry about the baby is a sign of anxiety
- Depression lasts longer than the baby blues

How a diagnosis happens

Who checks on my mental health, and when?

Whoever is caring for you at the time: your GP, practice nurse, midwife, obstetrician or child health nurse. The national guideline asks for at least four checks, two before the birth and two in the baby's first year.

- Check 1: first antenatal visit, or as early as practical.
- Check 2: at or around 30 weeks of pregnancy.
- Check 3: 6 to 12 weeks after the birth.

Treatment

Should I see a GP, a psychologist or a psychiatrist?

Your GP is where you start: the diagnosis, the plan and the referrals. A psychologist gives the talking treatment on that plan. A psychiatrist assesses serious or complex illness and sends a plan back to your GP.

Medication

I am running out of medicine or travelling: what now?

A pharmacist can give you a short emergency supply without a script if you already take the medicine and cannot get a script in time. It is usually 3 days, or 7 in NSW and the NT, and you pay for it yourself. If you move state, a new GP can continue your script. If you travel overseas, carry a doctor's letter.

- Only for a medicine you already take
- Most states allow 3 days; NSW and NT allow 7
- You pay for an emergency supply yourself

What it costs

What does perinatal mental health care cost?

Some of it is free: a public mother-baby unit and bulk-billed perinatal video counselling. The costs are private gaps, on antenatal and six-week visits and on psychologist sessions. No government body measures those gaps.

Some of this differs by state and territory. See the pages on your state at haihealth.au/blog/perinatal-depression-anxiety.

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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