



Understanding your mental health and emotional wellbeing following the birth of your baby (fathers)

Fathers are important and good mental health is important for fathers, their partners, and their children. Close involvement of fathers from birth supports positive family/couple relationships and fathers have an important role to play in child development.

Men go through many complex changes when they become a father which can make the perinatal period (from conception to one year after the birth of a baby) a particularly vulnerable time in a man's life.

The adjustment to these changes and the challenge of balancing demands, including your home and work life, economic pressures, the emotional needs of you and your partner and the unfamiliarity that can come with a new role, can affect your mental health.

- When becoming a new parent, fathers may experience many of the same stresses as mothers, such as sleep disruption, lifestyle changes, relationship conflict, and financial strain. Fathers may also experience additional stress from feeling they have to be a 'good father' as well as a supportive partner.
- Signs of stress include:
 - Physical symptoms, e.g. tiredness, headaches, high blood pressure.
 - Emotional symptoms, e.g. feeling worried, impatient, irritable.
 - Behavioural symptoms, e.g. smoking/drinking more than usual, being short tempered with loved ones.

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For additional Parent Tips see www.ihv.org.uk

The information in this resource was updated on 19/06/2020.

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- There is increasing evidence that some men may also experience mental health problems during this period. These are known as perinatal mental illnesses.
 - Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems experienced by new fathers, with 1 in 10 new fathers developing depression and even higher numbers experiencing anxiety.
 - Some fathers may experience new, or a worsening of existing, mental health problems such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder and psychosis.
- New fathers are often unaware of the possibility of mental health challenges and can experience significant difficulties with seeking support.
- Several factors can affect your mental health as a new father. This may include worries about pregnancy and birth, a traumatic birth experience, challenges related to broken sleep, responding to a baby who cries a lot and supporting your partner and their emotional/mental wellbeing.
- Fathers of infants born very prematurely can be at increased risk of depression and anxiety over the first year after their baby's birth.
- The peak time for fathers to experience depression is often between 3 and 6 months after the birth of their baby, but it can happen at any time.
- These struggles are potentially harmful for men's own wellbeing, their relationships, and their families.
- There are also several things that you can do to improve your emotional wellbeing and reduce the risk of perinatal mental health problems, such as: -
 - Recognise that you may sometimes feel down or low about being a parent.
 - Make sure you talk to your partner, family, and friends about how you are feeling.
 - Focus on the enjoyable aspects of parenting and have special moments that you share with your new baby, such as bath time, skin-to-skin contact or baby massage. There are online resources below that can help you gain ideas about how you can interact with your baby or speak to your health visitor for advice. See iHV Parent Tips "How can Fathers get involved?": <https://bit.ly/2N40I3O>
 - Try to maintain any important hobbies or social events.
 - It is important to avoid negative coping strategies, such as drinking too much or working too hard and staying away from home.
 - Allow time for yourself, away from work and family.
 - Take regular exercise.
 - Don't try to be "Super dad".
 - Don't try to do everything at once. Make a list of things to do and set realistic goals.
 - Contact local support groups, such as Fathers' groups or national help lines for advice and support.
- Remember: Parenting can be challenging but it does get easier.
- Don't despair. You're not to blame. Perinatal mental health problems can affect anyone, and it can be treated with the right support and help.
- The quicker you speak out and get help, the quicker the recovery.

How to get support

- If you, your partner, or your family are concerned about your emotional or mental health there is support available.
- Contact your health visitor, midwife or GP who will be able to offer and refer you the right support and help including online resources, self-help advice, self-help groups, talking therapies, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and/or antidepressant medication.
- Your health visiting service is available for all the family including fathers. You can contact your health visitor if you have any worries, questions, and concerns about your own health, your baby, or your partner.

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Resources

Dads Matter UK is here to provide support for dads worried about or suffering from Depression, Anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

<https://bit.ly/3hvTJZZ>

The Dad Club, a meeting place for fathers of young children that is run by parents, for parents:

<https://bit.ly/3ejoEqx>

New dads: your guide to good mental health:

<https://bbc.in/2Y7eAep>

Dad Life: Tips and advice to help you navigate parenthood and bond with your baby: <https://bbc.in/2YCQV4t>

The Fatherhood Institute: <https://bit.ly/2zBGkOV>

Dad Pad: <https://bit.ly/3e7JAAy>

iHV Parent Tips "How can new Fathers get involved?": <https://bit.ly/2N40I3O>

"I didn't realise that men could also get Postnatal Depression until my health visitor told me".

"My partner was included in antenatal and health visiting care, but I think he needed more support with emotional health as he was struggling more than he said, due to our baby being unwell".

"There's a lot of stress on Fathers".

"Work was a big stress as there was pressure to return to work as soon as possible despite having a premature baby who required care in the neonatal unit. I was worried about money, job stability and being able to do my job when I was there because I was so tired".



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