

## What is perinatal illness?

The transition to parenthood can be both a wonderful and rewarding experience but also brings many challenges and stressors. In those with an underlying vulnerability, the physical, emotional and social changes can trigger an episode of mental illness, such as depression ranging from mild to severe (antenatal and postnatal), PTSD and anxiety which affects around 1 in 10 women, and studies showing similar results in men. Women who are isolated or going through very stressful experiences are also at risk. Risk of mental illness in the perinatal period is further increased if a woman has pre-existing mental health problems including bipolar disorder and/or those with a family history mental illness including postpartum psychosis. Perinatal mental illness is one of the major causes of maternal death (from suicide), however with the right support and treatment, women can get well, with high recovery rates avoiding such tragedies.

Women with pre-existing bipolar disorder are at significant risk of developing postpartum psychosis. This condition can also occur in the absence of any past mental illness. Postpartum psychosis is a very serious condition that can have devastating effects on the woman and her family; it affects around 2 in 1000 women. Most women will have mild to moderate illness, including depression, anxiety and PTSD. 90% of women diagnosed with perinatal mental illness are cared for in primary care usually GP's and not under or necessarily known to mental health services. There are effective interventions for these conditions; the vast majority of women will recover fully, improving outcomes for both women and families.

The first two years of a baby's life are the building blocks of their long-term social and emotional development. Intervening early reduces the impact of the disorders on the mother, her child and family. Research shows 1 in 5 partners have depression, anxiety or other mental illness and they may also need treatment.

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