

Welcome to Parenthood



Parenthood can be a wonderful and special time but it also has its challenges. In order to support and value mothers and fathers and their unique experiences of parenthood we need to start talking ...

The emotional rollercoaster of pregnancy and early parenthood is common ... excitement competes with overwhelming exhaustion and sometimes distress. The Gidget Foundation aims to promote a community where parents are nurtured and valued, enabling them to enjoy this special time in life with their young children.

HAVING A BABY CHANGES EVERYTHING!

Previously known as postnatal depression, anxiety and depression during the perinatal period (from pregnancy to one year after birth) affects around 20% of mothers and 10% of fathers. This is a time of great adjustment with nearly 50% of parents finding this transition challenging.

The good news is that perinatal anxiety and depression can be treated and parents do recover. Early intervention and emotional support enables parents to move on to enjoy this time with their children.



WHAT IS PERINATAL ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION?

Perinatal anxiety and depression is a diagnosable condition and needs to be considered when:

A mother or father is experiencing strong emotions which are impacting negatively on their ability to function as usual and have lasted for two weeks or more. This is accompanied by a lack of enjoyment or pleasure in life and an inability to plan for the future.

Perinatal anxiety and depression affects over 50,000 families in Australia each year. Left untreated, the impact on the mother, father, child and other family members can be profound. It is a recognised and diagnosable medical condition, the result of biological, psychological and social factors. Mothers and fathers do benefit from receiving professional help.

Perinatal anxiety and depression should not be confused with the 'baby blues' that occurs 3 to 5 days after giving birth. These feelings of tearfulness and anxiety affect around 80% of mothers, are transient and will dissipate.

Many parents experience a range of emotions during pregnancy and the first year after giving birth. That's normal. But, if sadness or stress become overwhelming and interfere with everyday life it could be time to seek some extra support.

WHAT ELSE MIGHT BE HAPPENING?

Adjustment Disorders: It is normal to feel a range of emotions while navigating through this period of transition. Roles are often redefined as parents learn to manage the emotional and physical stresses and the ups and downs of life with a new baby. Parents who are experiencing adjustment disorders may benefit from speaking with an understanding professional who can help by listening, putting these feelings in context and providing some practical ideas.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: can be described as repetitive and intrusive thoughts which may be related to aspects of the birth experience. Mothers and fathers may also have flashbacks to past trauma or mental health issues and may try to avoid or block out situations, thoughts and feelings that trigger these flashbacks. Professional counselling can help to alleviate these thoughts.

Postnatal Psychosis: occurs in a very small percentage of women affecting 1 in 1000 women but requires acute professional support as the mother develops an altered sense of reality.

WHAT SHOULD I BE LOOKING OUT FOR?

'I just don't feel myself anymore.'

Symptoms of perinatal anxiety and depression can include:

- Inability to enjoy activities they used to enjoy prior to becoming pregnant or the baby's birth
- Unable to concentrate, make decisions or get things done
- Physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, constant headaches, sweaty hands, loss of appetite
- Feeling numb and remote from family and friends
- Feeling out of control, or 'crazy', even hyperactive
- Unable to rest even when the baby is sleeping
- Thoughts of harming themselves or the baby
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or repetitive thoughts
- Feeling trapped or in a dark hole or tunnel with no escape
- Feelings of grief, loss, anger, tearfulness

Risk factors for perinatal anxiety and depression can include:

- a perfectionist personality
- stress related to finances, paid work, or a recent move or renovation
- emotional stress (eg unplanned pregnancy, IVF)
- limited social support from friends and family
- lack of support or understanding from partner
- age less than 18 or over 35
- previous mental health problems

THE COMPLEXITIES OF SEEKING HELP!

While identification of mothers and fathers with perinatal anxiety and depression can be difficult, parents who are assessed and diagnosed benefit greatly from the help available and do recover. Women and men who are not supported can struggle on for years with anxiety and depression impacting all areas of their lives. This can also affect their relationships with family and friends and have a negative impact on their work.

Many parents struggle to find help for a number of reasons. They may not realise they have a problem that can be treated, The stigma associated with mental health problems may stop many parents even giving voice to their feelings. Many parents hide behind masks, not even sharing their feelings with close friends. There is also a fear of being labelled a 'bad parent'. Many parents simply don't know where to turn.

WHERE CAN I FIND HELP?

Sometimes mothers and fathers can find help in supportive friends or relatives. Professionals who can help include:

- Early Childhood Centre Health Nurse
- General Practitioner
- Midwife
- Obstetrician

These professionals can all be approached to discuss the emotional responses to managing a new baby. Some parents find this is all they need: a conversation to validate their feelings and the confirmation that little babies can be exhausting work. These health professionals are able to assess parents and can refer mothers and fathers to the following specialists if they require further support such as counselling and perhaps medication.

- psychologist
- psychiatrist
- social worker
- specialist support groups

**National Phone Line for support and information:
1300 726 306 9am-7pm AEST Mon-Fri**



WHO IS THE GIDGET FOUNDATION?

The Gidget Foundation was established in 2001 after the tragic death of a young mother suffering from postnatal depression. The Gidget Foundation is a charitable organisation and all donations are tax deductible. The foundation works to provide synergy with individuals and institutions supporting those with perinatal mood disorders. We are involved with education, awareness raising and advocacy as well as supporting specific programs to assist families. All funds raised are directed to our work supporting families during the perinatal period. In order to support and value mothers and fathers and their varied experiences of parenthood, we need to **Start Talking...**

The Gidget Foundation works collaboratively within the health industry, with corporate organisations and community groups.

Website, facebook & twitter: Professional and personal information for families affected by perinatal anxiety and depression, and a resource for health professionals. While this website provides general information and referral assistance it does not provide clinical advice.

Initiatives: Annual Tresillian Scholarship, Emotional Wellbeing Program in collaboration with the nib foundation at North Shore Private Hospital, Gidget House support services, Marce Society support

Resources: DVD, *Behind the Mask* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjqOqJLkyFs>
Book, *Beyond the Baby Blues* (2011) Knox, O'Reilly, Smith.

Events: Include unique Gidget events and collaborative events.

Networks: Our professional networks include health industry and business relationships. We have close relationships with health professionals, medical organisations and hospitals in both the public and private health sector. We also have relationships with corporate supporters and stakeholders.

Funding: Our work is supported through donations and grants. We receive no government funding.

Professional and Community Presentations: Medical student and midwife education, health professional meetings, corporate seminars, community presentations and conferences.

For more information and links to resources please contact:

Dr Vijay Roach FRANZCOG
Chairman
THE GIDGET FOUNDATION
www.gidgetfoundation.com.au

The Gidget Foundation exists to promote awareness of Perinatal Anxiety and Depression amongst women and their families, their health providers and the wider community to ensure that those in need receive timely, appropriate and supportive care.

