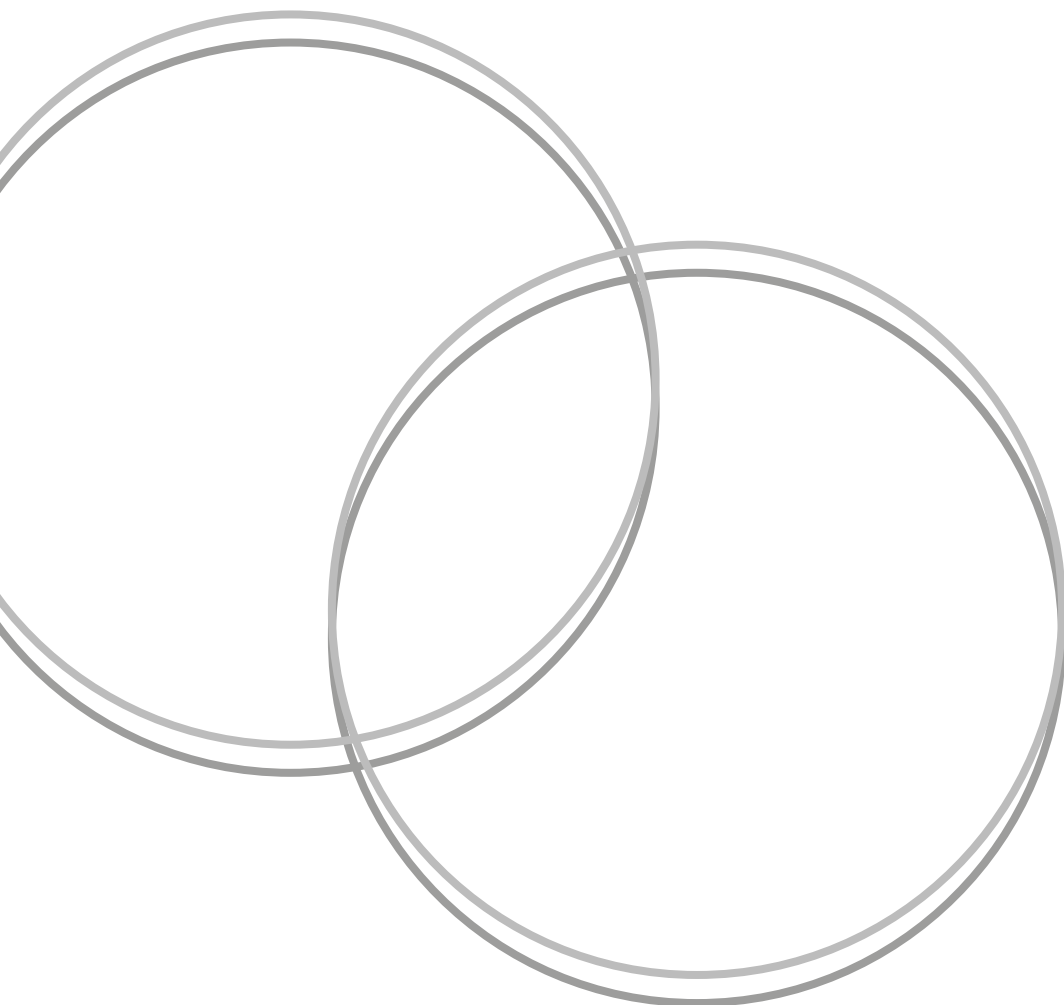


Mental Health - Postpartum Psychosis

Information for patients



What is Postpartum Psychosis (PP)?

Postpartum psychosis (PP) is a rare but serious mental health condition which occurs after birth, usually within the first few days or weeks.

The causes of PP are not fully understood – however, research has shown that some people are at higher risk of developing it than others.

It is important that PP is identified and treated quickly. There are a range of effective treatments available and it is possible to make a full recovery.

Symptoms

Most people with PP have the following symptoms and can change in mood quite quickly:

- Hallucinations: seeing, hearing, feeling, or smelling things that aren't really there
- Delusions: strange thoughts or beliefs that are not true
- Mania: feeling 'on top of the world', excited, losing touch with reality
- Severe confusion

Other symptoms can include:

- Low mood and tearfulness
- Feeling anxious or irritable
- Fast changes in mood
- Feeling restless and agitated
- Speaking so quickly that others find it difficult to interrupt you
- Sleeping less: finding it hard to go to sleep or not wanting to sleep
- Racing thoughts
- Behaviour that is out of character
- Becoming withdrawn, not talking to people
- Losing inhibitions, doing things you would not normally do
- Feeling paranoid, suspicious, afraid

Risk Factors

The overall risk of developing PP after birth is 1 in 1000 - however, certain people are at increased risk:

- Those who have had PP before
- Those with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder or schizoaffective disorder
- Those with a mother or sister who had PP or a diagnosis of bipolar disorder during pregnancy or the postnatal period

If you have any of these risk factors, let your community midwife know so that they can refer you for additional support.

- Those with a close relative (parent or sibling) with bipolar disorder

No additional support required, however be aware of the symptoms listed above.

However, PP can happen to anyone. Half of women or birthing people who develop PP have no risk factors.

If the first pregnancy is unaffected by PP, there is a lower risk of it occurring in any other pregnancies

Support

If any of the symptoms above are noticed, you should act quickly and seek urgent help. Usually, it would be the friends and family of someone experiencing PP who reach out for support.

In a crisis:

NHS 111 24/7 Mental Health Helpline

Oxfordshire Safe Haven

01865 903037

Open 11.30am to 9.30pm every day

Call 999 or attend A&E when there is a risk to self or others

People who develop PP often need to be treated in hospital. This might sometimes include admission to a specialist psychiatric hospital called a Mother and Baby Unit, where it is often possible for the baby to be admitted alongside their mother.

Most people with PP need to take medication under the supervision of a psychiatrist. Mothers can often continue to breastfeed whilst taking these medications, if they want to, and your psychiatrist would discuss this with you.

Anyone diagnosed with PP would be offered support by the Perinatal Mental Health Team in their area.

PP is not anyone's fault and does not mean you have done something wrong. Together with the team caring for you, support will be put in place for you and the whole family. It can take months to fully recover from PP, however most people get back to feeling like their usual selves.

References

Action on Postpartum Psychosis (2018). *Planning pregnancy: a guide for women at high risk of Postpartum Psychosis*. [online] Available at: https://www.app-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/2018-Insider-guide_PlanningPregnancy.pdf

Royal College of Psychiatrists (2018). Postpartum Psychosis. [online] Available at: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/mental-illnesses-and-mental-health-problems/postpartum-psychosis>

We would like to thank the Oxfordshire Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership and the Perinatal Mental Health Team (Oxford Health) for their contribution in the development of this leaflet.

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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