

### How we can help?

At Karitane we offer a range of services for women and families experiencing perinatal mood disorders. Health professionals at Karitane work in partnership with families to assist them to recover from depression and anxiety. If you think you or your partner may have depression or anxiety seeking assistance and support is important.

*For further information and support please consult:*

- *Child & Family Health Nurse*
- *General Practitioner*
- *Your local community mental health centre*
- *Karitane Careline on 1300 CARING (1300 227 464)*
- *Lifeline 24 hour counselling 131114*
- *Beyond blue website at [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) (a National Depression Initiative)*

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# depression & anxiety during pregnancy & early parenting

Perinatal Mood Disorders is a term used to describe symptoms of depression or anxiety that occur during pregnancy or up to 1 year postnatally. Mood changes affect up to 1 in 5 women and can begin before or after the birth of the baby. Symptoms of anxiety and depression can also be experienced by men as they adjust to fatherhood.

Many parents suffer in silence which can aggravate the symptoms and prevent them from enjoying their baby. Seeking help early is an important part of managing such problems successfully and building confidence as a parent.



### Signs and Symptoms & How you might feel

Parents' experiences of depression and anxiety are different. The signs and symptoms of perinatal mood disorders include:-

- Feeling empty, sad or tearful
- Anxiety or panicky feelings
- Inability to relax, restlessness, or racing thoughts
- Inability to sleep, disturbed sleep or excessive sleep
- Appetite changes
- Anger or irritability, lashing out
- Guilt, self-blame
- Inadequacy, feeling like a failure as a parent, not coping
- Helplessness, hopelessness
- Isolation, feeling alone
- Not bonding with baby or fear of something happening to the baby
- Lack of concentration, poor memory, unclear thinking, difficulty making decisions
- Chronic exhaustion, no energy, low motivation or hyperactivity,
- Lack of interest, inability to enjoy things, or withdrawal from social contacts
- Thoughts of self-harm or harm to the baby



### Contributing factors and possible reasons why this condition occurs

As at any other time of life, depression, anxiety and related symptoms do not have one specific cause. They are likely to be the result of a combination of factors that contribute to parents becoming more vulnerable to mood changes. These factors may include:

- A history of depression and or anxiety
- A family history of mental health problems
- A stressful or unplanned pregnancy
- A prolonged labour and / or delivery complications
- Experiencing severe baby blues
- Problems with baby's health and care or having an unsettled infant
- Lack of practical, financial and / or emotional support
- A past history of abuse or neglect
- Difficulties in close relationships

- Being a single parent
- Major life changes such as a bereavement, moving house, changing or losing a job, financial stress etc

### The importance of seeking help early

When Perinatal Mood Disorders occur, parents need to seek help as soon as possible. This can:

- Identify difficulties, treat and monitor progress
- Prevent ongoing family distress and anxiety
- Develop strategies to better manage underlying problems such as proneness to anxiety
- Build positive pleasurable parenting experiences
- Ensure and monitor the baby's emotional and physical wellbeing
- Enhance relationships, including those with baby, partner and other children in the family.

### How do I know if I have a Perinatal Mood Disorder?

A diagnosis can be made by a health professional following a comprehensive assessment. You may have filled out a set of ten questions which is known as the Edinburgh Depression Scale (EDS) which is often used as part of the assessment. Following the consultation, the clinician will discuss the various treatment options available for you.

### How others can help?

- Talk openly, try not to give advice or opinions, don't judge
- Listen and accept the parent's feelings, try to understand their needs
- Support and reassure the parent that you will be there for them
- Look after the baby whenever you can
- Helping around the house is important – without taking over
- Use family and friends for practical support and time out
- Give encouragement and support in seeking assistance from a health professional you trust.

Some things that might be helpful in managing depression or anxiety include:

- ☞ *eating well*
- ☞ *regular exercise*
- ☞ *time out for yourself*
- ☞ *talking to someone you trust*
- ☞ *talking with other new parents*
- ☞ *finding time together as a couple*
- ☞ *keeping in contact with friends and*
- ☞ *asking for help from family and friends*
- ☞ *talking to your health professional.*