

Prevention and Wellbeing Factsheet: Perinatal Mental Health

Key messages

- Women with existing or previous mental health problems are more likely to become unwell during pregnancy or within the first year of birth. This is more common in women who have had severe mental health problems (e.g. schizophrenia, post natal depression, severe depression, OCD, an eating disorder etc.). Women who have had a serious mental illness or who have received treatment from mental health services previously should be encouraged to accept the offer of a referral to a specialist during pregnancy, even if they feel well.
- Some women with a mental health problem stop taking their medication during pregnancy due to fears about the effect on their baby. Women should discuss any concerns with their midwife or GP as stopping their medication suddenly may cause their mental health condition to return or deteriorate which can have a negative impact on their baby. The GP or midwife can help them understand the advantages and disadvantages of taking medication.

Why is it important?

- Women who are unwell during their pregnancy:
 - May not be able to take good care of themselves
 - May not attend their antenatal appointments meaning that they may miss out on important care. This can increase the risk of pregnancy-related complications.
 - May remain unwell after birth which can affect their relationship with their baby and make it more difficult to care for them.
- For women who drink alcohol or use drugs they may increase their use when unwell.
- Many medications are safe for women to take during pregnancy while some may have negative effects on the unborn baby. Where there are concerns it is important to discuss them with a GP or psychiatrist. In some cases the impact of not treating the mental health condition may be worse than the impact of a particular medication. .

The picture in Barnet

- According to 2013/2014 data from the National Child and Maternal Health Intelligence Network there were an estimated 150 women resident in Barnet who were suffering from severe depressive illness during pregnancy and after childbirth.
- 2013/2014 data from the same source indicated there were estimated to be between 495 and 740 women suffering from mild to moderate depressive illness and anxiety during pregnancy and after childbirth.

Other important messages to consider

- Depression and anxiety are the most common mental health conditions in pregnancy.
- Post natal depression usually begins within the first 6 months of giving birth. If left untreated it can last for more than a year. Recovery is better when it is identified and treated earlier.
- 'Baby blues' make women feel low and tearful. They normally occur during the first week after birth and are caused by hormonal changes.
- Talking therapies can be useful for some mental health problems in pregnancy. In some cases these can be used instead of or alongside medication.

Signposting to local services and online support

<p><u>National Childbirth Trust</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide advice, support and counselling on all aspects of childbirth and early parenthood.• https://www.nct.org.uk• 0300 330 0772
<p><u>The Association for Post Natal Illness</u></p> <p>Provides support, education and information around post natal illness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• apni.org• 0207 386 0868• info@apni.org
<p><u>Children's Centres</u></p> <p>Provide an important source of information and support for new parents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• https://www.barnet.gov.uk/citizen-home/children-young-people-and-families/childcare/childrens-centres.html
<p>Some people with a high level of need require support from a health or social care professional. They can be directed to their GP or Social Care Direct (020 8359 5000; socialcaredirect@barnet.gov.uk; 07506 693707 for text messages; 020 8359 2000 for urgent out of hours queries) as appropriate.</p> <p>For anyone with caring responsibilities who lives or works in the borough, Barnet Carers Centre can offer advice, information, emotional and practical support. They can be contacted on the following numbers: 020 8343 9698 (Adult Carers Outreach & Support Service and Carers Hospital Discharge Coordinator); 020 8432 2092 (Barnet Young Carers and Siblings); 020 8432 2091 (Community Home & Support Services) or via email admin@barnetcarers.org.</p>