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Taking care of your mental health

After giving birth

A simple guide

This resource is available
in multiple languages.
Ask your midwife for
more information.



Surrey and Sussex

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth



The first few weeks and months after giving birth can be very emotional.

You might feel joyful, happy and proud.
You may also feel worried or sad.



You might feel under pressure to be happy and to enjoy being a new parent.

This can be felt by both parents. But if you are feeling low or stressed, you are not alone.



Many people have mood changes after giving birth. This is sometimes known as the “baby blues”. It usually only lasts for 5 to 10 days.

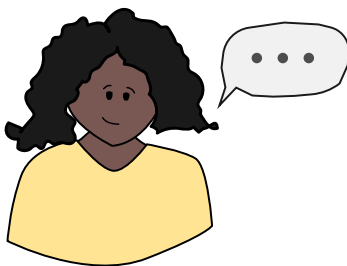
Taking care of your mental health after giving birth



Mood changes which last for more than 10 days could be a sign you need extra support.

1 in 4 people have mental health problems during pregnancy or in the first year after giving birth.

Who can help



There are some things you can do to look after your mental health. These include:

- Gentle movement every day.
- Talking to someone you trust.
- Being realistic about what you can get done.
- Asking for practical help when you need it.
- Eating well.
- Spending time outside.

Links for more support are on the back page.

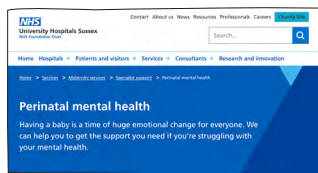
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Who can help

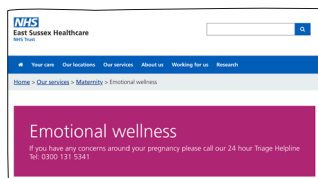


You can talk to your midwife, health visitor or GP. They will explain the services that can help and whether there is a waiting list for them.

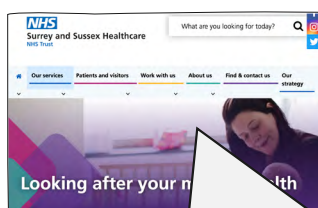
You may be referred to your hospital's specialist mental health midwife.



Click on the links below to find out more about support in your area.



West Sussex and Brighton & Hove: uhsussex.nhs.uk/services/maternity/specialist-support/mental-health

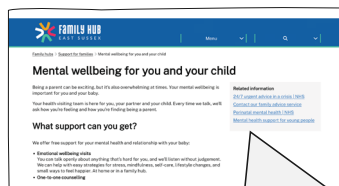


East Sussex: esht.nhs.uk/service/maternity/emotional-wellness

Surrey: surreyandsussex.nhs.uk/our-services/womens-services/maternity-services/your-mental-wellbeing-during-and-after-pregnancy

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Who can help



Click on the links below for more information on health visitors in your area:

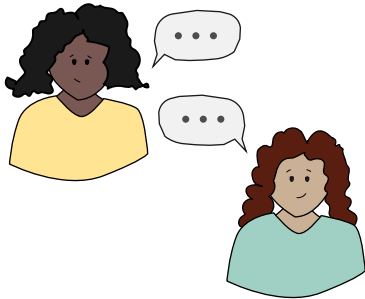
Brighton and West Sussex:

healthforunder5s.co.uk/sussex/services/specialist-support/specialist-health-visitors-perinatal-and-infant-mental-health-pnmh

East Sussex: familyhubs.eastsussex.gov.uk/families/mental-wellbeing

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Who can help



NHS talking therapies can help with your mental health. They involve talking to an expert about how you are feeling.

You can access support using the links below. Your GP can also refer you.

Brighton: brightonandhove wellbeing.org/talking-therapies

East Sussex: healthinmind.org.uk

West Sussex:
westsussex talkingtherapies.nhs.uk

Surrey: mindmattersnhs.co.uk



Your care team may refer you to the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service for further support.

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Who can help



If you need help right now you can:

- Call 111 and choose the mental health option.
- Call the Samaritans on 116 123.

In Sussex you can also:

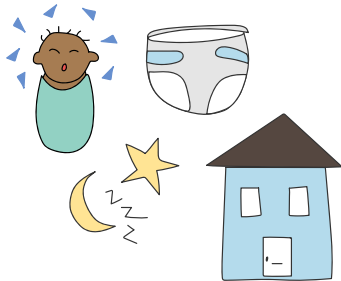
Text the word SUSSEX to 85258.

In Surrey you can also:

Call 0800 915 4644.

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Life with a baby



Life with a baby can be messy and stressful.

Lack of sleep and hormone changes can make you feel more emotional.



It can be hard if your baby cries all the time.

The Cry-sis helpline offers support for parents with crying and sleepless babies.

Call 0800 448 0737 for support.

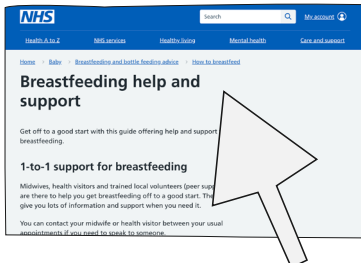


It can also be hard if you are having problems breastfeeding.

Your midwife or health visitor can help guide you.

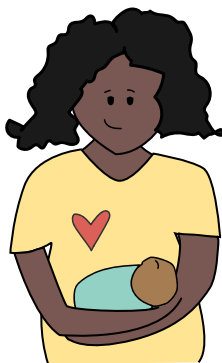
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Life with a baby



Click the link below to find out more about feeding support.

nhs.uk/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding/help-and-support

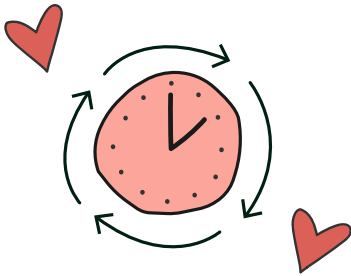


Some people feel guilty if they cannot, or do not want to, breastfeed.

Although breast milk is very good for your baby, it is important you are both happy and healthy too.

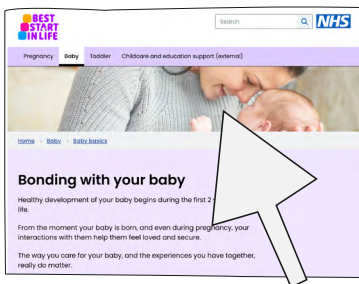
Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Bonding with your baby



Some people fall in love with their babies as soon as they are born. Some people find their love takes time to grow.

Both are normal.



Click the link below for tips on bonding with your baby.

nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/baby/baby-basics/bonding-with-your-baby



If you are finding it very hard to bond with your baby it could be a sign of postnatal depression or anxiety.

Talk to your midwife, GP or health visitor about how you feel.

Postnatal depression



Postnatal depression is not the same as the “baby blues”.

It lasts longer and is a mental health condition that needs treatment.



You may need help if you:

- ☐ Feel sad and tearful.
- ☐ Feel helpless or guilty most of the time.
- ☐ Worry about being alone with your baby.
- ☐ Find it hard to focus.
- ☐ Are sleeping more than normal.
- ☐ Find it hard to sleep even when your baby is sleeping.
- ☐ Feel more or less hungry than usual.
- ☐ Avoid contact with your friends, family or partner.

Talk to your midwife, health visitor or GP if you have any of these symptoms for more than 5 to 10 days.

Partner mental health



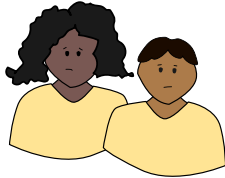
If you're the partner of someone who recently gave birth, you might feel the focus should be on them.

Your mental health matters too. You may feel angry, frustrated or like you want to avoid your baby. You can talk to your GP. You are not alone.

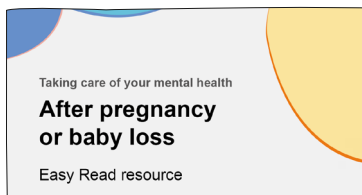
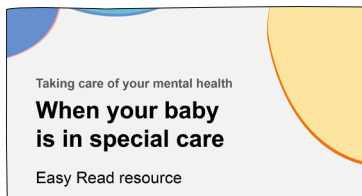
Your GP can refer you for support.

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Going home without your baby



There are times when you may need to leave the hospital without your baby.



Whatever the reason, this can lead to feelings of loss, shock and grief.

More advice on how to cope with this is available in our guides:

- Taking care of your mental health when your baby is in neonatal care.
- Taking care of your mental health after pregnancy or baby loss.

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Birth trauma and PTSD



Birth is different for everyone. It can be upsetting or scary.

You might not have had the birth you hoped for.



Up to 1 in 3 women and birthing people describe their birth as traumatic.

This can lead to:

- Low self-esteem.
- Guilt.
- Finding it hard to bond with your baby.
- Relationship problems.
- Fear of pregnancy or childbirth.

If you are feeling this way, you can talk to your care team for support.

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Birth trauma and PTSD



In some cases, birth trauma can develop into postnatal post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Symptoms of PTSD include:

- ☐ Bad memories about the birth.
- ☐ Nightmares or trouble sleeping.
- ☐ Pain or sweating.
- ☐ Avoiding talking about the birth.
- ☐ Feeling easily startled.
- ☐ Feeling angry.
- ☐ Feeling on edge or unable to relax.
- ☐ Feeling unable to bond with your baby.
- ☐ Avoiding places, people or things that remind you of the birth.

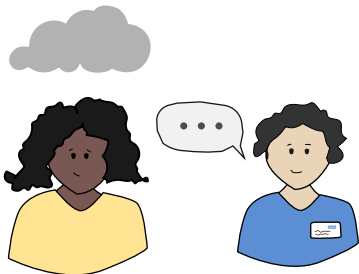


Talk to your GP, midwife or health visitor if you have any of the symptoms listed.

You can also use a debriefing service.

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Debriefs



A debriefing service is when you talk to a doctor or midwife about your birth.

It can help you:

- Understand what happened.
- Talk about your feelings about the birth.
- Ask questions.
- Bring up anything you are worried about.

Your history



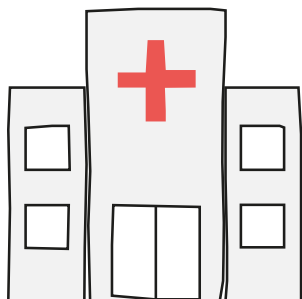
You should tell your doctor or midwife about your mental health history.

This is important even if you have been feeling well for a long time before your baby was born.

This will help make sure a plan is in place to support you.

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Further help



Your care team are here to support your mental health after you give birth.

Your hospital's specialist mental health midwife may be able to support you.

You may prefer to speak with your GP or health visitor about how you are feeling.

For further information to support your mental health after giving birth please see:

PANDAS – Mental health information and support
pandasfoundation.org.uk

Maternal Mental Health Alliance – Information
maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/about-maternal-mental-health

Birth Trauma Association - information and support
birthtraumaassociation.org.uk

Birth Rights – Your rights in pregnancy and birth
birthrights.org.uk

LGBT Mummies – Support for LGBT mums
lgbtmummies.com

ICON – Support with a crying baby
iconcope.org

Taking care of your mental health after giving birth

Support for dads and partners

Tommy's – Information on becoming a parent

tommys.org/pregnancy-information/dads-and-partners

Dads are Important Too – Information for dads

healthforunder5s.co.uk/sussex/local-advice-and-events/advice/dads-are-important-too

Dad Matters – Support and guidance for dads

home-start.org.uk/info-for-dads

If you do not have internet, you can ask your midwife or health visitor to print you a copy of any resources in this guide.

This guide has been reviewed by service users and support staff as well as lived experience champions and staff of the Maternal Mental Health Alliance.