



dread - as if something horrible will happen any minute; having a constant need to discuss and revisit the birth because it was so horrible and you felt things to be out of control; or not being able to think or talk about the birth; a feeling of numbness and lack of emotion - which also might extend to a lack of feeling for your baby, in fact, any feelings that are not "normal" for you should be addressed and you should seek help to start healing as soon as possible.

### Getting support

When seeking help, it is very important to first speak to your partner or close friends and family, to let them know how you are feeling. Articulating your emotions, no matter how irrational or irrelevant they seem will help you to begin to get better. You can also talk to your midwife, doula, birth partner or your health visitor. They may advise you to talk to your GP, who might refer you to a counsellor, but you can talk to whoever makes you feel comfortable and supported. However, if you have thoughts that you will harm your child or another member of your family either accidentally or deliberately, feelings that you would like to harm yourself or suicidal thoughts, you should seek medical attention as soon as possible as this could be a sign of puerperal psychosis, a severe condition that needs urgent attention. For post natal depression, there is plenty of alternative help available to help you to return to strength and enjoy your journey as a new mother.

### Diet and exercise

According to Alyssa Abbey, ([livewithenergy.com](http://livewithenergy.com)) a vitality and energy expert with over 18 years' experience helping people to maximise energy and minimise stress, the reality of motherhood can come as a shock and it is essential not to only look after the baby, but to look after yourself as well. "Early motherhood is exhausting. You've got to wake up in the night when your baby cries, live on very little sleep sometimes, and satisfy all the emotional demands of your baby," explains Alyssa. "To minimise the grey hairs and utter burnout, it's critical that you look after yourself during this time. Don't live on caffeine because it will only ruin the quality of sleep you do get. Do not compromise on your own diet. Eat loads of fresh vegetables and fruit, brown rice, brown pasta, nuts and

seeds as well as pulses and beans - this sort of food gives you amazing stamina compared to sugary snacks and processed junk." Drinking enough water is vitally important, especially while breastfeeding. "Don't neglect hydration - keep a bottle of water with you or near you in the house because in those first few months of motherhood you often don't feel you can leave the baby even to fill a glass with water. Filling a bottle also enables you to measure how much you've drunk each day. Go for two to four litres," advises Alyssa.

Exercise is very important, even if you feel you can't get out of your pyjamas before bedtime. "Don't put pressure on yourself to train for a marathon or anything like that. Just get out there and keep active. You can walk with your baby in a sling, and as soon as your baby can sit up properly for long enough, you can get a baby seat for your bike. It's more challenging to find time to exercise once you're a mother, but it is not an excuse to do nothing," says Alyssa. "Exercise is especially important if you're experiencing post natal depression. Exercise has been shown to be just as effective as medication in treating depression, and this is backed by the British Psychological Society and widely accepted by the medical profession." Gentle exercise such as yoga, Pilates or nature walks can help to gently ease you back into shape, while helping you to focus on something other than your feelings, and can help to kick-start your social life.

### Herbal help

Alternative treatments are available, and St John's Wort (also known as the 'sunshine herb') is the most common natural anti-depressant. Scientific studies of the herb suggest that it acts to increase the activity and prolong the action of the neurotransmitters serotonin and noradrenaline, in a similar manner to standard antidepressants, but with far fewer reported side effects. However, it can react with other drugs, so avoid it if you are taking prescribed anti-depressants, warfarin, or are on the contraceptive pill. Flower essences, such as Dr Bach's ([bachremedies.co.uk](http://bachremedies.co.uk)), can also help to balance and calm your state of mind. Remedies such as Gentian, Gorse, Sweet Chestnut, Elm, Larch and Rescue Remedy can all help.

Whatever steps you take, please don't feel that you have to go it alone. There are plenty of people out there to help you deal with the difficult emotions you are experiencing and who can assist you in getting your life back on track.

### Help available

[nctpregnancyandbabycare.com](http://nctpregnancyandbabycare.com)  
**Apni.org** - Assoc for Post Natal Illness  
**Bacp.org.uk** - British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy  
**Mama.co.uk** - Meet a Mum Association  
**Pnisha.org.uk** - Post Natal Illness Support and Help Association  
**Birthtraumaassociation.org.uk**

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## Useful Tools For Self-Healing

**Make time to rest** - taking a nap when your baby is asleep will revitalise you and help to make a dent in that rising sleep debt. Just 20 minutes will help to destress and refresh you.

**Lean on someone** - encourage your partner, or if you are single, a trusted friend, to support you by giving you a regular baby free hour. Use this time to indulge in the things you don't get the time for anymore.

**Be honest with family and friends** - if you feel tired and overwhelmed and can't face another visitor, be honest about

your need to be alone with your little one. Express your feelings - tell them that you are suffering from depression. It is important that you don't feel that you need to "go it alone". Use the support available to you, don't hide away.

**Don't overdo it** - your body is still recovering from the stress of pregnancy and birth. Don't feel that you have to spring right back into being who you were before, just with a baby attached to you! Use positive affirmations to boost your self-esteem - "I am a wonderful mother and a strong woman";

"I am loved and supported by my family and my friends". Use visualization to see a present and a future without depression; imagine how it feels to be happy, and you can begin to manifest this again.

### Further reading

Feelings After Birth: The NCT Book of Postnatal Depression by *Heather Welford*  
 The year after childbirth: Surviving the first year of motherhood by *Sheila Kitzinger*  
 The postpartum husband: Practical solutions for living with postpartum depression by *Karen Kleiman*