Looking after yourself

Becoming a new parent can be one of the most rewarding but also most stressful experiences in life. Finding ways to look after yourself that fit in with your situation and circumstances can make a big difference to your mental health and wellbeing.

How about...

- Trying not to pressure yourself
- Do something you enjoy
- Eat properly
- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- Take time to relax and gently exercise
- Go to local parent and baby groups
- Contact health services / specialist organisations
- Access the national organisations listed
- Tell someone how you are feeling
- Accept help

Contacts in an emergency, at weekends and out of hours

- A&E - Tel: 999 / 112
- NHS Direct - Tel: 111
- Domestic Violence helpline - 0808 2000 247
- Samaritans - Tel: 116123 / 0208 681 6666
- South London & Maudsley NHS Trust (adult mental health service) - 0800 731 2864
- National Breastfeeding helpline - 0300 100 0212

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Having a baby? Just had a baby? How are you feeling?

Having a baby is one of the biggest, life-changing experiences you will ever have. While this is often a happy and exciting time for you and your family, sometimes for many different reasons, pregnancy and the arrival of a new baby is not as easy and perhaps not as you had hoped or planned.

This leaflet is written by health visitors and is for Croydon mums and dads to let them know about some of the services that support parents and their babies.
It is quite usual during pregnancy and in the days and weeks after having a baby to have lots of very mixed feelings and emotions, some happy and others not so good. This is all part of adjusting to becoming a parent and is quite normal.

You might have worries about your pregnancy and your own health or other worries about family, relationships, money, work, housing etc. It may be that you had a difficult delivery, your baby has been unwell in special care or you may be finding feeding stressful. If these feelings won’t go away and seem to be getting worse, it’s possible you may have what is often called perinatal anxiety and / or depression.

These feelings can happen to anyone and you are not alone. Many mothers and fathers experience feelings like these and feel ashamed if they are not enjoying their baby and coping as well as they think they should. Some parents may also worry their baby will be taken away even though this very rarely happens. Talking to your partner, a friend or family member might be all the help you need to feel better in yourself and enjoy your baby. Sometimes, it can be easier to talk to someone you are not close to, but who knows and understands these sorts of feelings.

Asking for help doesn’t mean you can’t cope and won’t be able to look after your baby. This can be the start of getting the right help and support to be the parent you want to be.

How can I tell if I have depression or anxiety?

These are some feelings and symptoms that you may have noticed and might be experiencing:

- Feeling very low, tired, hopeless or numb
- Feeling very anxious and worried about things that don’t usually trouble you
- Not wanting to do anything or not being able to take much interest in what’s going on around you
- Being sad, guilty and angry with yourself that you are not coping as well as you think you should
- Being afraid of being alone
- Feeling unusually irritable which then makes the guilty feelings worse
- Wanting to cry but the tears won’t come or, crying a lot and not being able to stop
- Having frequent, irrational thoughts which seem to grow to become very scary (phobias)
- Having panic attacks that come at any time, racing heartbeat, sweaty palms, feeling sick and /or faint
- Difficulties sleeping - either not getting enough sleep, waking early or having disturbing nightmares
- Comfort eating or not wanting to eat or not enjoying the taste and smell of food
- Finding it difficult to concentrate or make decisions
- Experiencing headaches and/or other physical symptoms
- Having worries and fears about death and dying
- Having thoughts of harming yourself or your baby
- Feeling indifferent about your baby and towards your partner and family or friends

Asking for help is the best thing you can do and no one will think badly of you.

Who can help?

Your GP and Midwife can refer you on to other services. Health Visitors see families in the antenatal and postnatal months and are trained to understand perinatal anxiety and / or depression. They are used to listening and supporting parents who may be having difficulties. Your Health Visitor will also have links with a lot of other services in Croydon able to help you and your family.

www.croydonhealthservices.nhs.uk/health-visitors

Other services offering help

- Best Start Children’s Centres offer services, activities and support for families with children under five www.croydon.gov.uk/beststart
- Parent Infant Partnership - helps to build stronger bonds and more positive relationships with your baby. enquiries@croydondropin.org.uk
- Parenting programme - prh@croydon.gov.uk
- Parenting programme - prh@croydon.gov.uk
- IAPT - a self-referring counselling service that offers free, confidential, talking therapy for people who have symptoms of depression and anxiety. slam-iapt.nhs.uk, 0203 228 4040
- Croydon Perinatal Mental Health Team - this is a non-emergency service and your GP, Health Visitor or Midwife can refer you