

MEDIA RELEASE

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Women delay perinatal depression help, to avoid medicines

The earlier that a mother or mother-to-be gets help for depression, the better it is for her and the baby and the more likely she is to be helped without using medicines, Professor of Women's Mental Health at the University of Melbourne, Anne Buist says. "Signs of depression before the birth of a baby may indicate a postnatal risk."

About one in three women experience postnatal depression. Fifteen percent have more severe symptoms which can negatively affect the baby and lead to chronic depression, marital difficulties and suicide, according to an article in the current issue of ***Australian Prescriber***.

For many women, depression may start while they are pregnant and they are reluctant to seek help perinatally as they do not want to take prescription medicines while they are pregnant or breast-feeding writes Professor Buist. ("Perinatal" refers to the time before a baby is born and a year after it.)

"Unless women have previously had depression, they rarely recognise it for themselves before the birth. For most women, this is their first episode of depression and it is unexpected because they feel they should be happy about becoming a mother," says Professor Buist.

When women do seek help, it is often for the baby and not for themselves. She says some pregnant women and new mothers can be reluctant to admit to their feelings as they fear their doctor may prescribe antidepressants.

"Many women with perinatal depression may not need medicines," says Professor Buist. "Although in some cases medicine may become an option depending on how serious the depression is." She discusses how counselling and support groups may help some mothers. Doctors, nurses and other health professionals can help to connect women to these groups.

"Change of life stress at this time is normal and needs to be distinguished from major depression," says Professor Buist. She encourages women to talk to their doctor, pharmacist or nurse, or to contact a support organisation.

National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS) Medicines Line provides advice about taking medicines while pregnant or breastfeeding. Call 1300 888 763 from Monday – Friday from 9am – 6pm to speak with a pharmacist (for the cost of a local call), or visit www.nps.org.au.

BeyondBlue can be contacted on 1300 22 4636 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au, and the Post and Ante Natal Depression Association (PANDA) has some useful information on its website at www.panda.org.au. PANDA can be reached on (03) 9481 3377 or, from within Victoria, on 1300 726 306.

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To read the article visit the Australian Prescriber website www.australianprescriber.com

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