



Early Intervention Service

Psychosis associated with pregnancy and childbirth

Introduction

Many women of childbearing age suffer from ante or postnatal depression. Amongst women who become unwell at this time, a very small number develop a psychosis. This is a rare condition, but has been recognised for centuries.

Why does this happen?

Is stress involved?

We know that stress, and the cumulative effect of stress, can play a contributory role in a developing psychosis.

What stresses might be around?

Pregnancy and childbirth involve many bodily changes for a woman. This includes hormone levels and her body shape. This is also a time of adjustment to becoming a bigger family. It may include other life-changes such as leaving a job, financial worries, moving house etc. These factors make this a stressful time in a woman's life.

What else contributes?

Other factors might include previous illness in the family, and in some cases cannabis. N.B. The first episode of psychosis has a peak incidence for women around childbearing age.

What is it like?

When does it show?

Psychosis may show up in various ways during pregnancy or soon after giving birth. Sometimes it can happen suddenly without warning.

What would be noticed?

Sometimes a mother may become overactive and more talkative, with strings of ideas which appear confused. She may stay awake all night and become preoccupied with things other than the baby.

What else?

Sometimes the mother may present as feeling low in mood and be slowed down, sleeping and be slowed down, sleeping and eating poorly and ignoring her baby. She may develop odd thinking. This might include unusual ideas, such as that the baby is not hers or belongs to someone else.

Anything else?

She may hear voices or see things that other people do not see. Colours, sounds and smells may be perceived differently. The mother may become muddled and confused or seem dreamy. She may think others are trying to influence her in ways that are not possible like receiving messages over the television.

What should I look for?

Some early warning signs to look out for which could indicate that a mother might be developing a psychosis include:

- continuous lack of sleep
- difficulty thinking clearly
- suspicious/mistrustful of others
- odd thinking/behaviour
- withdrawal from family/friends
- increased anxiety/depression with above
- feeling confused about her identity

What should I do if I suspect that someone is developing a psychosis?

- Speak to someone from the EIS for advice.
- Refer to EIS using the telephone numbers on the back of this leaflet.

Is referral needed quickly?

The most important thing is that help is sought promptly. It cannot be overemphasised how much easier it is to treat this condition early. A mother experiencing these sorts of symptoms will probably talk to her midwife, health visitor or GP. But she may not recognise what is happening herself. Often it will be the family, midwife or health visitor who notices that all is not well.

What happens then?

This is obviously a very difficult time for the family and every effort will be made to make it easier. Treatment might be a three-fold approach.

1. Perhaps a very low dose of one of the newer medications
2. Talking things through and building confidence
3. Looking at practical issues such as housing worries or childcare.

What is the outlook?

With this approach there is an excellent prospect of full recovery but the team stay available for some while.

Notes

Notes

Oxfordshire Early Intervention Service

Telephone: 01865 902 724

Buckinghamshire Early Intervention Service

Telephone: 01865 901 517

If you need the information in another language or format please ask us

Nëse ky informacion ju nevojitet në një gjuhë apo format tjetër, ju lutem na kontaktoni

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