

Breastfeeding issues linked to depression in new mothers

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Eight in ten parents believe unsuccessful or painful breastfeeding is a key factor contributing to [depression](#) in new mums, according to a Priory survey.

The survey findings mirror current UK statistics highlighting the amount of women stopping breastfeeding soon after starting [continues to be low](#).

Priory consultant psychiatrist and expert in parent and child mental health, **Dr Kathryn Hollins**, believes that new mums need plenty of practical and emotional support in the early days of breastfeeding for the best chance of success.

Majority of parents believe breastfeeding problems can fuel depression

According to more than 1,000 parents surveyed in the UK, 80% of parents felt that difficulties with breastfeeding contributed to [symptoms of depression](#) in new mums.

The Priory Group is calling for greater understanding and support for new mums who experience difficulties when breastfeeding.

This figure was also high among men surveyed, with 77% acknowledging that unsuccessful breastfeeding was a contributing factor to depression in their partners following birth.

Dr Kathryn Hollins says: "New mums need to be gently encouraged to explore all reasons as to why breastfeeding might not be working for them - and that an excessive amount of pressure, although well intentioned, from health professionals and peers may do more harm than good."

What are the factors behind breastfeeding problems?

While there remains little doubt that new mothers understand the benefits of breastfeeding, the pressure to breastfeed may be having a negative effect.

It is believed only 1-2% of women are physiologically unable to breastfeed, suggesting there are also psychological factors, as well as physical reasons.

Gill Walton, Chief Executive of the Royal College of Midwives, said: "Breastfeeding has to be something that a mother wants to do in the interest of the health and wellbeing of her baby."

There can be a variety of reasons women struggle to breastfeed their newborns:

- ❖ Life with a demanding and hungry new-born can be an emotional roller coaster. If breastfeeding is part of the problem, then giving up might seem the solution to avoiding additional stress
- ❖ Despite the great strides made in promoting breastfeeding, some women still feel embarrassed or unwelcome in public places.
- ❖ Although generally seen as positive and helpful, some women describe the hands-on approach of midwives and breastfeeding counsellors as crossing personal boundaries.
- ❖ Breastfeeding can symbolise a loss of independence, particularly if the pregnancy or labour has been difficult.
- ❖ Much is made of breastfeeding being "a powerful symbol of a new role as a mother" but if it doesn't happen, it can lead to great feelings of disappointment or of "failing" to live up to their own expectations"

What can I do if I'm having problems breastfeeding?

Improved access to professional support and specialist services could help new mums understand and work towards overcoming their barriers towards a happy breastfeeding experience.

The importance of using talking therapies early in the process could ensure that mums receive the advice they need at the right moment.

Dr Hollins concludes: "I would recommend to any new mum to proactively find out about breastfeeding support in her area, including breastfeeding cafes and drop-ins."

"Life does change – and, little by little, all new mums can become the mum they want to be for their children. And, if and when it feels right, that can certainly include successful breastfeeding."

The Priory Group has opened the latest in a series of high street [Wellbeing Centres](#), in central London, to help people gain quick access to mental health treatment. [The new central London clinic \(located on Harley Street, W1\)](#) offers a parenthood, pregnancy and family service for antenatal and [postnatal depression](#) and [anxiety](#), as well as other issues such as a traumatic birth and difficulty bonding.

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For details of how Priory can provide you with assistance regarding mental health and wellbeing, please call **0800 691 1560** or [click here to submit an enquiry form](#).
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Tags: [Depression](#), [Mental Health Treatment](#)

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