

Information for patient and family about risk of postnatal mental health problems

As you may know, the period after the birth of a baby is a time when women are at a particularly high risk of developing mental ill-health.

You have been identified as having a small increased risk of becoming unwell after your baby is born, because there is a family history of bipolar disorder.

The risk of mental ill-health is highest in the first week after the birth of your baby, and gradually decreases as time passes. 90% of significant maternal mental health problems will arise before the baby is a month old.

Mental ill-health that develops after the birth of a baby can begin very quickly, and the signs to look out for are:

- High anxiety that gets worse and worse over a period of hours
- Inability to sleep or rest
- Confusion, disorientation or muddled thoughts
- Agitation or restlessness
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Disturbance in mood, either too high or too low (although “baby blues” are quite normal in the third to fifth day after the birth)
- Fears that the baby will be harmed, or that there is something wrong with the baby

These signs may not be always present, but may come and go. You can reduce the risk of relapse by ensuring you protect your sleep pattern as much as possible – not easy with a new baby, but an important step.

If you or your family notice these signs, or have any other worries about your mental health, the options for getting help and advice include:

- Your GP or out-of-hours GP service
- Your local A&E department
- Your local mental health assessment team

Although these illnesses can begin very suddenly, they are also very treatable, and we will do our best to resolve any problems as quickly as possible for you and your baby.