


Key Facts

- ▶ **1 in 10 fathers** will experience depression or anxiety during pregnancy or the first year following pregnancy.^{1,2,3}
- ▶ Depression and anxiety are **twice as common** in expecting and new fathers as compared with global estimates in men.^{1,4}
- ▶ The peak onset of depression in fathers is **3-6 months** following the birth of a baby.^{1,5,6}
- ▶ Men experiencing anxiety or depression are more likely than women to...
 - **Cite physical symptoms** such as changes in appetite or sleep, fatigue, headaches, psychomotor changes (e.g. restlessness, increased heartbeat, muscle tension, pacing).^{12,13}
 - **Show irritability, anger, aggression, and frustration**, which can lead to isolating, withdrawing, risk-taking, avoidance, and substance use.^{14,15}
- ▶ The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) has been validated for detecting depression in fathers, but with **lower scores than for mothers**.^{7,8,9}
- ▶ Untreated paternal depression can have **long-term negative impact on the child's development and health** across multiple domains, and increases the risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences.^{2,10,11}
- ▶ There is limited data about the prevalence rate of **paternal depression based on race and ethnicity**; additional research in this area is needed.

 **Maternal depression is the most important risk factor for paternal depression.**^{1,2,5}

Untreated Paternal Depression	
Can Increase...	Can Decrease...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hostility and conflict in the home, particularly with spouse / partner.^{16,17} • Feelings of resentment toward the baby. • Negative parenting and harsh discipline, such as spanking or corporal punishment.^{7,16} • Children's behavioral, emotional, and conduct problems.^{18,19} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive engagement with the infant – less sensitivity, warmth, playfulness, or touching – which can delay attachment with the baby.^{20,21} • Positive interactions with older children – such as reading, singing, playing, or storytelling – which can negatively impact the child's social and emotional wellbeing.^{6,7} • Adherence to general safety guidelines for safe infant sleep and car seat usage.²¹

Stress

Fathers experiencing anxiety or depression often cite **stress as a major contributing factor**, including having a new baby in the home, adjusting to changes in sleep and household routines, adapting to new and demanding tasks and roles, struggling with financial and economic concerns, and balancing work-life concerns. **Stress can increase the level of cortisol in the body, which can contribute to or exacerbate symptoms of irritability and/or depression.**^{2,7,19}

Causes and Risk Factors

- Personal or family history of depression or other mental illness⁶
- Lack of social supports and networks²
- Changes in hormone levels^{6,13}
- **Issues or concerns about the baby:**
 - Unwanted / unintended pregnancy²
 - Low birth weight, premature birth, infant in NICU⁶
 - Difficulties in bonding with the baby¹⁴
 - Feeling excluded from mother-infant bonding²²
- **Issues or concerns about the partner / spouse:**
 - Maternal depression^{1,11}
 - Complications during pregnancy and/or delivery, including traumatic birth or unexpected C-section¹¹
 - Relationship conflict, such as dissatisfaction, disharmony, criticism, and communication difficulties^{7,11}



Fathers experiencing anxiety or depression often say that they felt invisible or unnecessary during pregnancy, birth, and the immediate postpartum period, and that this experience contributed to them backing off even more from their partner and the baby.^{11,22}

Fathers experiencing anxiety and depression say...^{8,11,12,14}



"I did not know anything about fathers getting postpartum depression. By the time I realized I had depression, our family had nearly broken apart."

"Men are expected to be big and strong and stoic, to take care of everything, to be a tough guy. It was hard to acknowledge that I needed help."

"I don't feel I can tell my wife about these feelings. It will make me look weak or it will sound ridiculous because she is with the kids more than me."

"I am constantly on the verge of bursting into tears. Work is extremely stressful now and I'm very irritable."

"I hate my baby's crying, his needs, his endless discontent."

"Nobody tells you how hard it really is."

"I was so ready to be a dad, but all I can think about is how miserable I am."

Treatment Can Include a Combination of...

Adequate Sleep,
Exercise, Nutrition¹⁹

Practical and
Emotional Support⁶

Perinatal
Psychoeducation^{19,6}

Therapy or
Counseling^{6,7}

Medication⁷

Cultural Considerations in Clinical Settings

BIPOC fathers may experience unique, **race-based stressors during the perinatal period that increase the risk of depression and anxiety**, which should be accounted for in the clinical case conceptualization. In addition, disparities in health, healthcare access, income, and local resources can place additional stress on BIPOC fathers.²³ BIPOC men also tend to be stigmatized in various parts of their life, including fatherhood. For example, **Black fathers are stereotyped as uninvolved parents despite being the most involved fathers across racial categories.**²⁴ Clinicians need to be conscious of their own biases and incorporate a holistic understanding of the father's experience into the treatment plan to optimize clinical care.

Resources, Trainings, and Programs

Postpartum Support International has a webpage ([LINK](#)) dedicated to support for fathers, which includes:

- Specialized Coordinator for Dads
- Dad Support Group
- Monthly "Just For Dads" Chat
- Facebook group for dads
- Video of dads sharing their experiences

Foundations in Paternal Perinatal Mental Health Training by Postpartum Support International [LINK](#)

An online and in-person training for psychotherapists, medical providers, and allied birth professionals to gain valuable knowledge of the key psychological, interpersonal, and systems-level factors related to fathers as they navigate the transition to parenthood.

Resources to learn and create connection with others:

- Basic Training for New Dads [LINK](#)
- Bootcamp for New Dads [LINK](#)
- Center for Men's Excellence [LINK](#)
- Dads With Wisdom [LINK](#)
- Daddy Boot Camp [LINK](#)
- Postpartum Men [LINK](#)
- The Dovetail Project [LINK](#)

International Father's Mental Health Day (IFMHD) [LINK](#)

IFMHD – the day after Father's Day – features a social media campaign highlighting key aspects of fathers' mental health. The stigma of experiencing emotional and mental difficulties in early parenthood is even higher for men than for women, which is why this day and social media campaign is needed to open up the conversation about fathers' mental health.

Books About Fathers and Their Mental Health

Mark Williams is a paternal mental health advocate and author. He saw his wife experience a traumatic birth, and later experienced postpartum depression himself. He suggests the following books as great resources for fathers. Read his article [HERE](#) and watch his TEDx Talk [HERE](#).

- *Fathers and Perinatal Mental Health: A Guide for Recognition, Treatment and Management* ([LINK](#))
- *Paternal Mental Health: Factoring in Fathers* ([LINK](#))
- *Sad Dad: An Exploration of Postnatal Depression in Fathers* ([LINK](#))
- *Daddy Blues: Postnatal Depression and Fatherhood* ([LINK](#))
- *Dad: Untold Stories of Fatherhood, Love, Mental Health, and Masculinity* ([LINK](#))
- *New Fathers, Mental Health and Digital Communication* ([LINK](#))
- *The Postpartum Husband: Practical Solutions for Living with Postpartum Depression* ([LINK](#))
- *The Life of Dad: The Making of the Modern Father* ([LINK](#))

Editorial Team

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