



Borderline personality disorder in pregnancy and the postnatal period

A guide for women and their families

Living with borderline personality disorder can be challenging. Having a baby makes things a bit more difficult. That's why it is important to get help.

How common is borderline personality disorder?

Around 3 in 100 Australian women aged 25 or more experience borderline personality disorder.

What causes borderline personality disorder?

Problems in childhood may cause borderline personality disorder. This includes sexual, physical or emotional abuse or neglect.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Unstable and extreme emotions (sadness, irritability, anxiety)
- Efforts to avoid being abandoned
- A history of intense and unstable relationships with people
- Not having a clear sense of who you are as a person or how you feel about yourself
- Impulsiveness (e.g. spending lots of money, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating)
- Talking about or engaging in self-harm and/or suicidal behaviours
- Ongoing feelings of emptiness
- Feelings of anger that may be intense, inappropriate or difficult to control
- Being paranoid or feeling disconnected from the world when under stress

How is borderline personality disorder identified?

Talk to your doctor about your symptoms. If you have five or more of the symptoms listed above, you may have borderline personality disorder.

Borderline personality disorder during pregnancy

If you are pregnant and have borderline personality disorder, it is a good idea to talk to your doctor or midwife about how you feel. Also tell them if anything about the care you are receiving troubles you. It is usual for pregnant women with borderline personality disorder to receive care from a team of health professionals, including mental health services.

Parenting with borderline personality disorder

A mother with borderline personality disorder may struggle with her relationship with her baby. She may not feel the way she thinks that she should feel about the baby. She may also find caring for the baby difficult. It can be very hard to cope when the baby is crying or distressed when you have trouble managing your own distress.

Having a mother with borderline personality disorder affects infants in different ways. If the mother's behaviour is 'frightening' for the infant or she has trouble responding to the infant's emotional needs, it is more likely that the infant will develop problems with emotions and relationships. Having other people take care of the baby sometimes can reduce these effects on the baby.

Getting support

- A family support service may be able to visit you and your infant in your home
- An individual therapist can support you and help you manage your feelings
- Therapy for you and your infant helps to build on your relationship
- Having someone else care for the baby (family or child care) gives you a break to look after yourself



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How is borderline personality disorder treated?

Talking therapies

Your doctor will talk to you about psychological (talking) therapies.

Dialectical behaviour therapy is the most studied therapy for borderline personality disorder. It can help decrease inappropriate anger, reduce self-harm and improve general functioning. Long-term therapy may be required.

Registered practitioners with appropriate training and experience provide talking therapies for individuals or groups.

Medicines

Medicines are not usually used to treat borderline personality disorder. If your symptoms are strong, your doctor may give you a short course of medicines.

Advice for women experiencing borderline personality disorder

Seek help and treatment

- Seek help from a doctor or other health professional.
- Learn about effective treatments.
- Call a support service or mental health crisis line if other help is not available.

Accept help and support

- Develop a support system of friends, family and professionals and accept help.
- Discuss your feelings with your partner, family and friends.

Look after your physical health

- Try to eat healthy meals, including fruit, vegetables, whole grains and lots of water.
- Plan some enjoyable physical activity every day.
- Try to establish good sleeping patterns.
- Practice techniques to reduce stress, such as muscle relaxation and deep breathing.

Advice for family and friends providing support

Listen and reassure:

- Encourage the woman to discuss her symptoms.
- Explain that borderline personality disorder can be managed.

Provide information:

- Give the woman good quality information about borderline personality disorder, such as this fact sheet.
- Give details of helplines if she is feeling distressed and needs support.
- Offer information to the woman's partner/others.

Direct to care and support:

- Encourage the woman to talk to her GP or other health professional.
- Encourage the woman to identify and draw on possible supports and services that may be available to her for practical and/or emotional support.
- Remind the woman that she can go to her doctor or local hospital if she is at risk of harming herself or others.

