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Postnatal Depression and Nutrition: A Nutritional Perspective on Maternal Mental Health

Introduction

- Understand the definition & characteristics of postnatal depression (PND)
- Identify key risk factors & biological mechanisms behind PND
- Explore the link between nutrient deficiencies & maternal mental health
- Evaluate the impact of dietary patterns on mood
- Learn practical nutritional interventions & support strategies

Postnatal Depression

- Postnatal depression (PND) is a mood disorder that affects mothers after childbirth
- It can impair mother-infant bonding and family dynamics
- Often under-diagnosed due to stigma and normalisation of maternal struggles

Baby Blues vs. PND

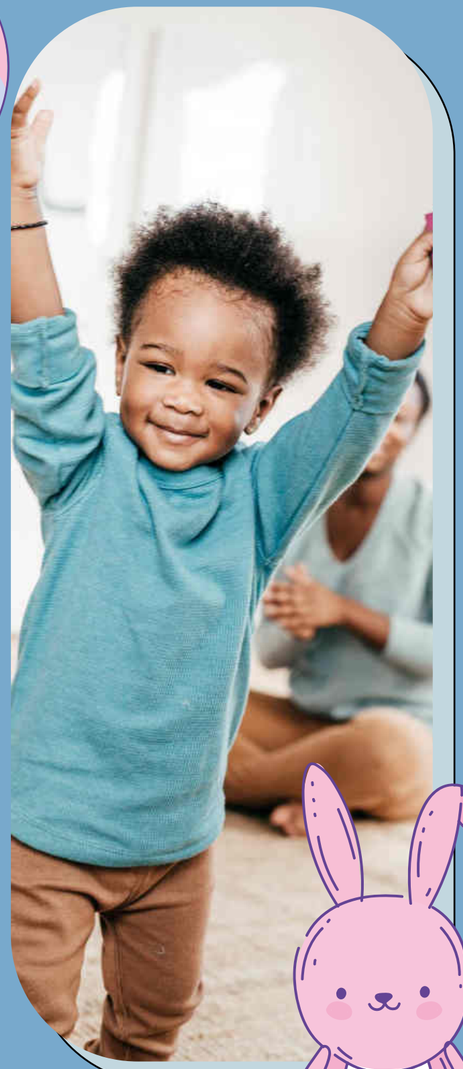
- Baby blues begin 2–5 days postpartum and typically resolve within 2 weeks
- Characterized by mood swings, tearfulness, anxiety, and irritability
- PND has a later onset (weeks to months postpartum) and lasts longer
- PND includes more severe symptoms: persistent sadness, low energy, guilt, and difficulty bonding
- Baby blues usually need no treatment beyond reassurance; PND often requires clinical intervention

Diagnostic Criteria for PND

Symptoms Include:

- **Depressed mood most of the day**
- **Anhedonia (reduced ability or inability to experience pleasure from activities that were once enjoyable or rewarding).**
- **Appetite and sleep disturbances**
- **Fatigue or loss of energy**
- **Feelings of worthlessness or guilt**
- **Suicidal thoughts**

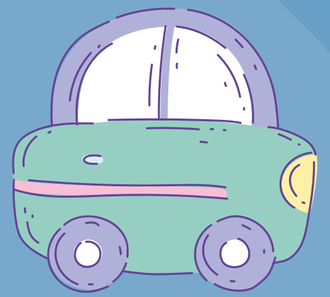
Prevalence and Global Impact



- **Personal/family history of depression**
- **Hormonal fluctuations**
- **Stressful life events**
- **Lack of social support**
- **Nutritional deficiencies**

Risk Factors AND Biological Mechanisms: Hormones & Neurotransmitters

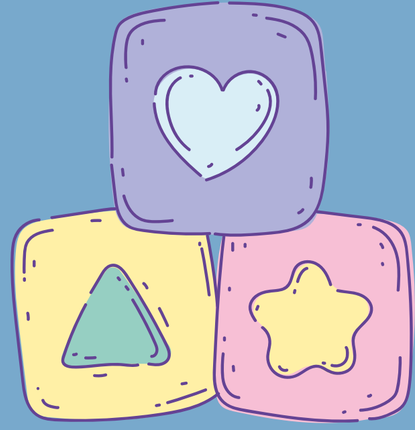
- Drop in oestrogen & progesterone post-birth
- Dysregulation of serotonin and dopamine pathways
- Cortisol elevations & HPA axis imbalance



Inflammation AND Biological Mechanisms: Hormones & Neurotransmitters

- Chronic low-grade inflammation linked to depression
- Inflammatory cytokines disrupt neurotransmitters
- Diet can modulate inflammatory response

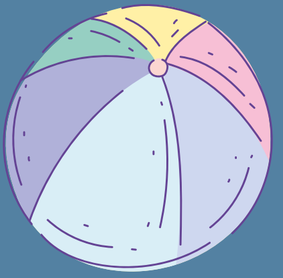
The Gut-Brain Axis



- Gut microbiota influence mood and behaviour
- Dysbiosis linked to anxiety and depression
- Prebiotics and probiotics can support gut health

The Role of Nutrition

- Nutritional status influences mental health outcomes
- Key nutrients impact neurotransmitter synthesis
- Dietary patterns affect inflammation and gut health



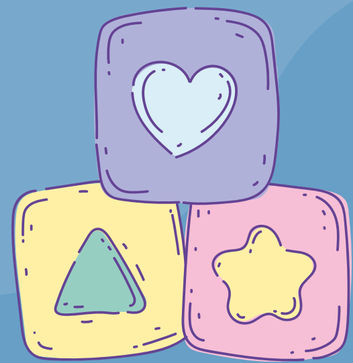
Key Nutrient: Omega-3 Fatty Acids AND Vitamin D

- **OMEGA-3 supports brain development and mood regulation**
- **A Deficiency is linked to higher PND risk**
- **Found in: oily fish, flaxseeds, walnuts, chia seeds, supplements**

- **VITAMIN D Regulates mood via serotonin production**
- **Low levels common in postpartum women**
- **Sources: sunlight, eggs, fortified food, supplements**

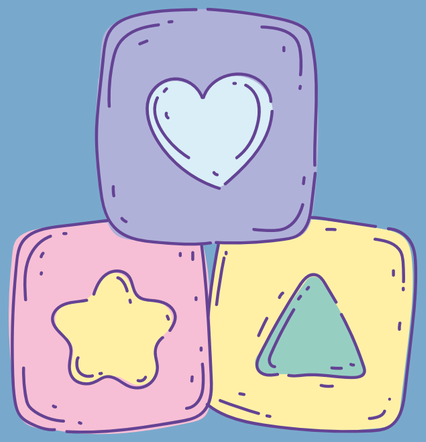
Key Nutrient: B Vitamins AND Iron

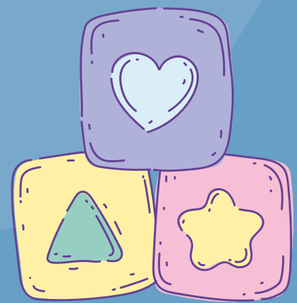
- **B-VITAMINS: B6, B9 (folate), and B12 are essential for neurotransmitter function**
- **Deficiencies linked to depressive symptoms**
- **Sources: leafy greens, legumes, animal products (meat), supplements**
- **IRON: Iron deficiency common postpartum**
- **Linked to fatigue, low mood, poor concentration**
- **Found in: red meat, spinach, supplements**



Key Nutrient - Zinc

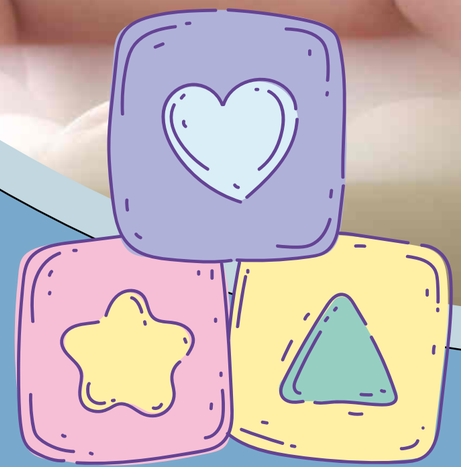
- Zinc supports neurotransmitter function and immune health (and even hair and skin health)
- Deficiency associated with depression and anxiety
- Found in: meat, shellfish, legumes, pumpkin seeds
- Supplements





Summary

- PND is common, serious, and multifactorial
- Nutrition influences, hormonal balance, inflammation, neurotransmission
- Early dietary interventions has been found to enhance maternal mental health



Thank You!

Questions and Discussion