- Fatherhood

How to look after your mental health as a new dad

REMEMBER TO PRIORITISE YOUR OWN WELLBEING. BY CAMILLA FOSTER

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BECOMING a father for the first time can be incredibly exciting, but also overwhelming – and adjusting to this new chapter in life can sometimes take a toll on your wellbeing.



New research from Swansea University has raised concerns about suicide rates among new fathers, suggesting that they could potentially be at a higher risk than new mothers.

The study – which was funded by The 1001 Critical Days Foundation – examined suicide rates among mothers and fathers in Wales between 2002 and 2021 during the first 1,001 days of their babies' lives and found that during this period 16 mothers and 107 fathers died by suicide.

The authors of the study have called for fathers to be included in specialist perinatal mental health services.

Here, experts share some insights on signs which may indicate that new dads might be struggling mentally and emotionally.

WHAT ARE SOME SIGNS THAT A NEW DAD MIGHT BE STRUGGLING?

"Mood changes that last longer than a couple of weeks, such as irritability, withdrawal, or sudden anger, can be red flags," highlights Waqar Azam, integrative psychotherapist at Living Well UK. "Struggling to sleep even when the baby is resting, feeling persistently hopeless or overwhelmed, or losing interest in things that used to bring joy are also warning signs.

"Partners or family might notice changes first, such as increased drinking, working excessively, or avoiding home life."

WHY DO MANY DADS STRUGGLE TO OPEN UP?

“Many men feel a societal pressure to live up to the role of protector or provider,” recognises Waqar. “Talking about their emotions can feel like weakness, especially if they have not had models of men being open about mental health.”

The psychotherapist also noted how this silence can build into resentment, burnout, or more serious depression.

“It can also impact relationships with partners, leading to misunderstandings or feelings of disconnection at a time when teamwork is vital,” explains Waqar.

If you are a new father who is struggling to cope with the pressure, here are some helpful tips that may help...

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CREATE A SIMPLE MORNING OR EVENING ROUTINE

“Starting the day with a five-minute stretch and a glass of water can give structure,” says Waqar. “Sharing one small daily ritual with your baby, such as reading or bath time, also builds connection and strengthens your role as a parent.”

TALK TO SOMEONE THAT YOU TRUST

“Pick someone safe to talk to, and try opening up the conversation with the line ‘I’m finding it really difficult to have this conversation, because I’m not used to talking about these things,’” recommends BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) counsellor Sarah Wheatley, who runs Birth and Beyond. “This helps let them know that this is a really difficult conversation for you and that they really need to listen and pay attention.”

“Even a short daily walk can reduce stress and boost mood, it may also give you the opportunity to clear your head, enjoying some peace and quiet,” says Waqar.

WRITE IT DOWN MOVE YOUR BODY

“Writing a journal can be a good way for new dads to start to reflect on what they are feeling or notice any changes,” says Sarah. “Also, if you struggle to open up to people, writing things down things in advance of that conversation can be helpful. For example, think about : what do I want them to know? Is there anything I want them to do?”

STAY CONNECTED

“Ensure you keep in touch with friends and family,” advises Waqar. “Social support is one of the best protective factors against poor mental health. They don’t say ‘it takes a village’ for no reason.”

DON’T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP

“Whether it is childcare, household chores, or professional support, you do not have to carry everything alone,” says Waqar.

PRIORITISE SLEEP

“Sleep is one of the biggest factors in mental health and a lack of rest can intensify anxiety and low mood,” highlights Waqar. “While no parent gets perfect sleep in the early months, sharing

night-time duties where possible and taking naps when the baby naps can make a real difference."

BREATHING EXERCISES

"Taking five, slow breaths when you feel tension rising can help calm the body," says Waqar.

DOWNLOAD SOME HELPFUL APPS

"The Headspace and Calm apps can help with short meditations and stress management," says Waqar. "DadPad is also great and is designed specifically for new fathers, giving practical advice and reassurance. For mood tracking, apps like Moodfit or Daylio can help spot patterns that might be missed otherwise."

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF NEEDED

"If you notice that your mood is different and you have been feeling low for a couple of weeks and it doesn't seem to be shifting, speak to a professional about this," recommends Sarah. "Don't wait until you are feeling desperate. Go and see your GP to find out what support you could be getting as soon as possible."