



Dads are often forgotten when it comes to PND screening

Article by: [Nicole Madigan](#) | Published: 09-12-2020

Photo: Dads are often forgotten when it comes to PND screening

Growing up, Peter Burge assumed being a father would be something that came naturally.

His wife Kate became pregnant relatively easily, though the experience of trying revolved around ovulation tracking and temperature taking, which Burge found a little less than romantic.

Throughout the pregnancy, Burge came along to scans and attended birthing classes, but remained focused on his work as a television producer.

“They say ignorance is bliss for a very good reason,” he says.

“I had no idea that I could have been doing things to prepare myself mentally and emotionally to help me adjust to bringing a human into the world.”

During labour, Burge played a supportive role, and watched in fascination as his son was born.

“When his little head popped out, time stood still.



“Nothing else in the world existed except for me staring in disbelief at what was happening.

“Yes, it’s cliché but I was deeply and madly in love with the little guy. His little face was gorgeous and both Kate and I were so happy.”

Burge says while he’d heard about some women experiencing ‘baby blues’ on day 3, he began to experience extreme emotion the day after his son was born.

“I was having some flashbacks to when I was a kid, and I remembered the all-consuming fear I felt. I was petrified that my little angel might have the same experience. It floored me.”





frightened and confused. I was having a panic attack, and I couldn't move."

When his wife asked him if he was okay, Burge said he was fine.

"I kept it all inside for as long as I could. Firstly, because my idea of masculinity was that I carried the weight.

"The other and more serious reason was because of the terrifying thoughts I was having.

"Thoughts of harming my son. Dropping him on purpose. Throwing him from a moving car and off our balcony onto the concrete below."

For a long time, Burge kept quiet, but was forced to come clean when physical symptoms began to develop, and his wife made an appointment for him with a psychiatrist.

"I held my breath as he started to talk but I could breathe easy because he went on to explain that I was having a severe emotional and psychological reaction to a very significant event in my life.

"Commonly known as postnatal depression and that yes, men can have it."

According to midwife, maternal and child health nurse and author of *Survive and Enjoy Your Baby*, Belinda Joyce, one in seven women will be diagnosed with PND, while the number is around 5 per cent for men.

Of course, the true prevalence is unknown and likely to be higher.

While MCH Nurses discuss both physical and emotional health with their clients and families, most visits are with the primary carer and baby or child.

"However, we encourage dads too," she says.

"In my practice as a MCH Nurse, I always try to check in on the dad as well, as they are often forgotten.

"If they attend appointments, I will ask both parents about their emotional health. If they are not attending, I will ask the mum about her partner and how she thinks he is coping, and ask her to talk with him about it as well.

"If the mum has symptoms of depression or diagnosed depression, I always discuss the fact that their partner is more at risk just by living in the same house."

In the wider community, it is well known that mothers experience PND, but there is less understanding about PND experienced by fathers. As a result, their mental health is often forgotten by family and friends.

"It is important for all health professionals to look for signs of depression in fathers as well," says Ms Joyce.

"Dads are often forgotten in the pregnancy, birth and the early parenting journey and they should not be.

"Without a diagnosis they often won't get any professional support and this will delay recovery."

Ms Joyce says the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression are similar between men and women, although women tend to be more focused on the baby in their thinking - concerns about their baby's health, not being a good mum, or whether their baby love them, for example.

"Whereas dads seem to have more generally anxious and depressive thoughts across all areas of their





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While child health nursing and midwifery workforces have had substantial PND training over the last 10 years, Ms Joyce says these services often see mothers much more regularly than fathers.

“I think the key is in engaging more fathers into health services, so they are seen more often and develop a rapport with staff.

“I feel that lack of engagement with our services is a barrier to more fathers being screened for PND symptoms.

Since his own PND, Burge has become passionate about raising awareness, which is why he founded Peerhear, which provides telehealth connections for people who don't really know where to start to look for support, as they experience psychological distress.

“No-one ever tells you how hard it is being a parent. Of course, for me, it is the best thing I've ever done, but moreover, it is also the most challenging by a country mile.

“If any new Dad is feeling unwell or struggling - please tell someone.

“Your partner is a good start. If, like me, you don't feel comfortable, please contact us at Peerhear. We know how you feel.”

Visit <https://www.peerhear.com.au/>

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