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## My Perinatal Depression Journey

(The British NHS describes the perinatal period as the time from when pregnancy commences until up to a year after giving birth.)

### Sharing

I am sharing my story of my own Post Natal Depression journey, which was 23 years ago, I was diagnosed with it after my son's birth. I just hope that by sharing my story one person going through the same mental stress will feel less alone.

At 37 weeks at a regular check-up, which I went to by myself, I was told that my baby had not grown in the previous two weeks and my blood pressure had become high, so I was booked into the hospital to have my child that day, they said I should be able to still have a natural birth, but my son had other plans, after 24 hours of being in labour, I was told I needed an emergency C-section.

### After giving birth

After giving birth to my son, I kept waiting for the feeling of that "rush of love" that so many mothers talk about, and when it didn't come, I thought something was wrong with me, as I loved my child without a doubt.

My son at 6 weeks needed a stomach operation, which after his operation he would never go back to being breastfed. I found this hard to accept, due to others saying breastfeeding was bonding time with your child, and I thought I really needed this.

My son was a very happy child and slept well, except when you went to try and feed him, this could be a bottle or any food, he would just start crying and screaming. He needed tube feeding on and off over the next twelve months, to get food into him. This was very stressful, this meant that I was dealing with a lot of health services and hospital stays which meant talking to each one about my problems with not being able to feed my child, they would all tell me that he was under weight and needed to put on weight. This was another job as a mother that I felt I failed at. I watched how easy it was for other mothers to feed their children.

### A breaking point

My son's feeding issues were my breaking point, I had midwives in the hospital that had heard about this child that would not even take a bottle and they would seek me out and they would tell me that they were going to show me how to feed him as they had been a midwife for over 25 years, I had other mothers in the meeting with multiple children have a go, due to they never had any issues with their children, once I had a young sister at a camp that I attended that had heard about my son, which asked for a go, as she took care of orphaned animals.

### Well-meaning, but...

Even though they all meant well, and were trying to help and ease my burden, they would take my child from me and try and feed him, and he would be screaming, and I just wanted him back in my arms to comfort him. They all would give him back without success and I would have to settle him. Everyone thought I was the problem, which made me lose all my confidence. I felt very alone and isolated, and even would avoid going to ecclesial activities, especially if food was involved and I would need to feed him, and if I went when a meal was involved, I would not feed my son there, I would wait until I got home to have the struggle to try and feed him, without people around.

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### A low point

At my lowest point I thought my son would be better off without me, this was only because I loved him so much and felt I couldn't look after him. My mind was of course wrong, I was suffering from **postnatal depression**, and I was unwell. **I would pray daily to my Heavenly Father** for the strength to cope with each day, and overcome my struggles, I also sought professional help, and with the **combined support** of my amazing husband, my family and my brethren and sisters, I recovered.

I was very thankful and grateful, and felt unbelievably blessed by my God when He answered my prayers, and I overcame my mental health difficulties. I had suffered from poor mental health for many years, but when I was blessed with overcoming my illness, I had a strong desire to help others suffering from mental health issues. I felt the reason I suffered mental health issues was so I could help others, I would not let myself ask why it happened to me, but I am very thankful for the strength it gave me to be the person I am today.

### Larger than life!

My son is now 23 years old, larger than life; I have gone on to study and work to assist people with their mental health journeys, and by giving them help and encouragement to reach their goals and live a full life. My journey with mental health strengthened my faith, and my trust in our Lord. Proverbs 3:5. We need to learn to trust the journey even if you do not understand it, sometimes it's the journey that teaches us a lot about our destination. We need to remember Jesus' words to his disciples in John 13:17, "You don't understand now what I am doing but someday you will". We need to have trust and faith in our God, for His plans with our lives. I also have this saying: let your past make you better, not bitter.

### There is no shame in post-natal depression

My biggest message for any mother who is struggling is that you are not alone and there is no shame in how you are feeling. Having postpartum depression does not mean that you don't love your baby, it is a mental health condition, and with treatment can be resolved. Uncompromised love from my son did come and came with strength and clarity, and he is a fit and healthy brother in Christ now. **If you have symptoms, seek help**, by talking to your doctor or midwife, or join a support group so you can share and see other mothers who also are experiencing anxiety and depression, so that you don't feel so alone.

### Remember

- Part of taking care of our babies is taking care of ourself.
- You do NOT have to suffer in silence or feel ashamed. Our babies need us to be healthy during a time when we are overwhelmed the most.
- One day, like me, you will tell your story of how you overcame what you went through, and it will be someone else's survival guide.

### Christadelphian Help-Line - 08 8270 4115

Perinatal Anxiety & Depression (PANDA) Helpline – call 1300 726 306

Beyond Blue - [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

COPE – Parental Support - [cope.org.au](http://cope.org.au)

Headspace - [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

Lifeline – [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

Kylee Mingham

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