

SUZANNE:

'My postnatal depression came back - I'll always fear it'

In a brutally honest interview, actress Suzanne Shaw opens up to Closer about her severe depression and how she wants to break down the taboo around mental health

The last time we met up with Suzanne Shaw she was exercising three times a week and eating well having recently given birth to her son Rafferty. She admitted that her healthy lifestyle was partly an attempt to ward off the postnatal depression she suffered so badly after having her eldest son Corey.

But despite her best efforts, just a couple of months later, Suzanne, 35 – who is engaged to businessman Sam Greenfield – found herself battling the dreaded illness.

"I was trying to do everything in my power to avoid getting it again: breastfeeding, exercising, eating healthily," she explains. "When I had Corey [with former partner Darren Day] I was 23 and a single mum, so after Raffi was born [in October 2015] I really thought I'd avoid it, because I had a stable family set-up."

Suzanne – who also had depression in 2012 after the death of her father, Vincent – admits that at first she didn't recognise the symptoms of her PND returning.

LACKING A BOND

Suzanne explains: "Raffi had so many allergies when he was born and struggled with feeding, and it took more than six months to get to the bottom of that. It was really tough and he constantly cried. So when I started to not feel like myself, I put it down to that. Then, last summer, I started getting really paranoid and stopped going

out. I didn't want to see my friends or go to baby groups or anything. Everything felt like hard work and I'd cry before Sam went to work because I was so worried about being left alone with Raffi. It seemed like my relationship with him was practical rather than emotional because of all his medical problems. I just thought: 'Oh god, how do I actually feel about him? Do we have a bond?'"

SEEKING HELP

The singer admits that she had to hit rock bottom before she was willing to accept that she was suffering with PND.

She says: "Things got so dark, then one day Sam was off work and I just couldn't get out of bed. I completely lost my appetite – I just physically couldn't consume anything. I knew there was something wrong but I didn't want to consider that it could be postnatal depression because I'd fought so hard to avoid it. Then my mum called me and just said: 'Can you do me a favour and go to see a doctor?' She knew I would have been defensive if she'd said it outright, but I knew what she was trying to suggest. I just started crying and I looked up a TED talk online about depression. Everything completely resonated with me. It was like my story was being told. Once I watched that I thought, 'I've got two children, I can't let this get the better of me.'"

Suzanne immediately went to see a doctor and was prescribed antidepressants alongside counselling.

She admits: "The doctor was amazing.

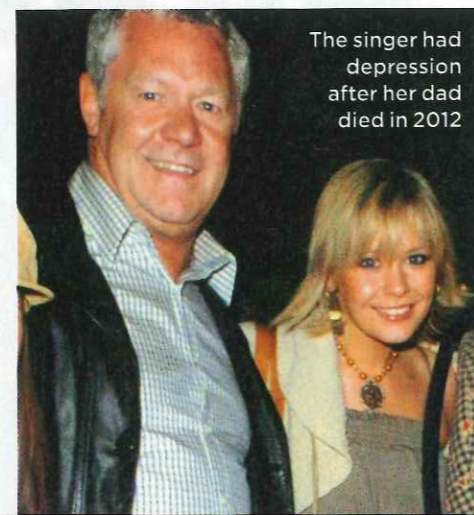


Suzanne with Rafferty, Corey and fiancé Sam

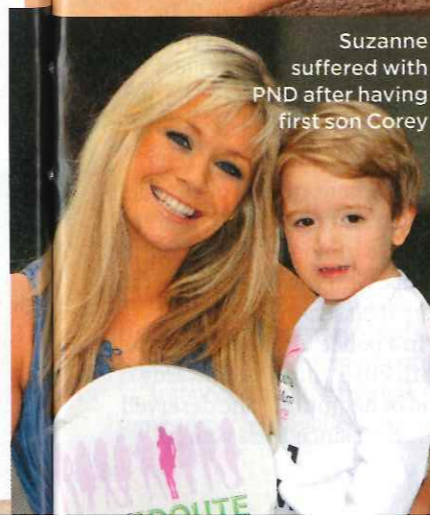
He was so supportive and caring. I was hesitant to go on medication again as I know how hard it can be to stop taking it, but I had to keep reminding myself that I was just taking a painkiller for the mind."

After a month, Suzanne started to feel better and admits the change was drastic.

She explains: "When the medication started to work, it was the biggest weight off my shoulders. I suddenly wanted to get up and enjoy the day and go out with Raffi. Our relationship is great now – Raffi gets



The singer had depression after her dad died in 2012



Suzanne suffered with PND after having first son Corey



'I got really paranoid and stopped going out'

HOW TO COPE IF YOU'RE FEELING LOW

SPEAK OUT

"Chatting to a family member or a friend can make you feel better. Be honest and tell them how you feel."

WATCH TED TALKS

"Head to YouTube and view TED videos on depression – some of them are fantastic."

GO TO YOUR GP

"Your doctor can help you with medication and counselling. It's important to be brave and talk about your problems."

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

"Don't beat yourself up about things – you're only human. Treat yourself as you would a friend."

HEAD TO TWITTER

"Follow @PNDandMe. PND sufferer Rosey does a Tweet chat every Wednesday. You can make an anonymous account to discuss it discreetly."

nothing but smothering and kisses! Looking back, I can't believe I waited a few months to get help – I was in denial for so long."

But Suzanne is now keen for the taboo around mental health issues to end and admits she's still terrified the condition could return.

She says: "There's definitely a stigma. A lot of women worry about being judged for having postnatal depression. It's not that you don't love your child, which is what I think people assume and why it is so hard to explain how you feel, it's just that the bond feels different and you need help."

POSITIVE THINKING

She adds: "I do fear depression and it puts me off having another baby now. I think I'll have another child, but I'll make sure I accept that I probably will get PND again and to not fight it. I can't see myself coming off the medication any time soon and I don't mind that. Right now I'm happy with where I'm at and I'm just taking each day as it comes."

And Suzanne says she's determined to enjoy living a happy family life.

"I feel like the past year has changed me as a person. I'm much more laid back now and don't get upset about things that don't matter," she admits. "Things are great with Sam – we have an amazing relationship and we're so happy with our boys and our little family."

By Annabelle Lee