



## **Depression and Mood Disorders During and After Pregnancy**

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HEALTH

For many mothers, pregnancy and childbirth may be followed by sadness, fear, anxiety, and a hard time making decisions. They may not be able to find the energy to care for themselves, their infants and their families. Some women even think about harming themselves and their children.

If this sounds like you or someone you know, remember:

**You are not alone. There is help.**

**Depression and mood disorders during or after pregnancy** refer to all of the emotional struggles that many women face when they have a baby. You may have heard this called the Baby Blues, Postpartum Depression, Maternal Depression, Prenatal Depression, Postnatal Depression, or Perinatal Depression.

Depression and mood disorders related to having a baby can be mild, moderate, or severe. The change in hormone levels can affect a woman's brain chemistry. This can occur during pregnancy or within a year after. Without treatment, symptoms may last for years. In rare cases, the symptoms are severe and the mother may harm herself or the baby. In all cases, help is available.

### **24-hour Suicide Lifeline**

If you have thoughts of hurting yourself, your baby, or others call this number right away.

**(800) 273-8255 or (800) 273-(TALK)**

## What Are Postpartum Mood Disorders?

There are 3 main kinds of mood disorders that are seen during pregnancy or after giving birth.

- Postpartum or Baby Blues
- Postpartum Depression or Anxiety
- Postpartum Psychosis

**Postpartum or Baby Blues** is a mild change in mood.

Emotions are up and down. It most often starts 3 to 4 days after giving birth and goes away by day 12. If symptoms last longer than 2 weeks, see your provider so it does not get worse.

You may feel:

- Sad (crying, worrying)
- Confused (forgetful, trouble concentrating)
- Restless (irritable, trouble sleeping)

**Postpartum Depression or Anxiety** is a serious medical illness that affects 1 in 5 women. It is caused by changes in the brain's chemistry. It is not the mother's fault or because she is weak or unstable mentally. Professional help is needed. Symptoms are:

- Three most common:
  - Very anxious and fearful
  - Quick to anger
  - Sleep problems (not being able to fall asleep, stay asleep, or go back to sleep)
- Sadness and feeling not good enough, crying often
- Poor appetite (eating too much or too little)
- Trouble thinking, remembering things, concentrating, and making decisions
- Loss of interest in caring for yourself (dressing, bathing, fixing hair, etc.)

- Feeling trapped but feeling guilty for feeling this way
- Feeling tired, helpless, worthless, or hopeless
- Lack of interest in normal activities
- Thoughts or a plan to harm self or child – **call 911**

More than one in every five new mothers develop postpartum depression or anxiety. It may not be diagnosed until months after the birth of a baby. A new mother may put off getting help because she has little energy, motivation, or may feel like she is being judged by others. Others may see the mother's mood as a normal reaction to the stress of caring for the infant.

**Postpartum Psychosis** affects a small number of women, one or two in one thousand. With this problem, there is little contact with the real world. A new mother may struggle with hallucinations or delusions. There is a small, but real, chance that they could harm themselves or their children.

Women who have a bipolar disorder or other serious mental health issues may have a higher risk for developing postpartum psychosis. An under active thyroid gland have also been shown to increase the chances of this developing. Symptoms may include:

- Confusion
- Feeling hopeless
- Cannot sleep – even when very tired
- Lack of interest in eating
- Not trusting others
- Seeing things or hearing voices that are not there
- Thoughts of hurting yourself, your baby, or others

**If you or someone you know has these symptoms, seek medical help now. This is a medical emergency!**

## What Causes Postpartum Depression?

There are a lot of reasons why you may get depressed. A woman's body goes through many changes during and after pregnancy. You may have mood swings. A new baby will change your sleeping schedule and your lifestyle. You may also feel pressure to be the perfect mother.

It is not always clear why a new mother gets depressed. Some women have family members with depression. Others have a personal history of being depressed. But every woman is unique and so are the causes.

## Who Is at Risk?

Postpartum Depression can affect women of any age, race, income, culture, or education. The biggest risk factor for having postpartum depression or a mood disorder is having had previous struggles with depression. Over half of the women who have had postpartum depression in the past become depressed again when they have another baby. Other risk factors are:

- A family history of depression or bipolar disorder
- A personal history of alcohol or drug abuse
- A recent stressful event
- Relationship or financial problems
- Mood changes with birth control pills, menstrual cycles, or hormonal changes with infertility treatment
- Having a baby that is difficult to care for or has special needs

## Signs During Pregnancy

Pregnant women can face issues such as morning sickness, weight gain, and mood swings. Feeling really tired, appetite changes, and poor sleep are often thought to be just part of pregnancy. If the things you do every day are affected, you should ask for help.

## How Do I Know if I Have Postpartum Depression?

Only a trained health care or mental health professional can tell you whether you have Postpartum Depression. This checklist can help you know whether you have some of the common symptoms. Mark the box if the statement sounds like you.

### During the Past Week or Two:

- I have not been able to laugh and see the funny side of things.
  - I have not looked forward to things I usually enjoy.
  - I have blamed myself when things went wrong, even if it is not my fault.
  - I have been anxious or worried for no good reason.
  - I have felt scared or panicky for no good reason.
  - Things have been getting the best of me.
  - I have been so sad that I have had trouble sleeping.
  - I have felt sad or miserable.
  - I have been so unhappy that I have been crying.
  - I have had thoughts of harming myself, my baby, or others.
- If this box is checked, seek medical help right away or go to the emergency room.**

If you checked more than one box, visit with a trained health care or mental health care professional. They can help you get help.

*Checklist adapted from the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale. Cox, J.L., Holden, J.M. & Sagovsky, R. (1987). "Detection of Postnatal Depression: Development of the 10- item Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale." British Journal of Psychiatry, 150, 782-876.*

## If I Have Postpartum Depression, What Can I Do?

Some women may find it hard to talk about Postpartum Depression and are unsure how to bring it up. They may try to deal with their problem on their own and hope that it goes away.

This is very common. Every woman needs to know that she is not alone. Postpartum Depression affects thousands of women and can be treated. Here are some things that can help:

**Lean on family and friends.** There are many ways that family and friends can help you. A few hours of child care can give you a much-needed break. Get help cleaning the house or running errands. When you share your feelings openly with friends and family, it allows them to offer support too.

**Talk to a health care professional.** Screening for depression should be a part of your health care during and after pregnancy. Your doctor, your baby's doctor, nurses, and other health care providers are familiar with Postpartum Depression. They know ways to help, and can explain your choices to you. Bring this booklet with you. Show them the items that you checked. If you feel that person does not understand what you are going through, please do not give up. Many providers are ready to listen to you and will help put you on the road to recovery.

**Find a support group.** You may not know it, but there are probably other women in your community suffering from Postpartum Depression. Finding them can give you a chance to learn from others and to share your own feelings. Ask your doctor or nurse if there is a support group in your area.

**Talk to a mental health care professional.** Many mental health professionals are specially trained to help women with Postpartum Depression. They can give you a safe place to talk about your feelings. They can also help you find the

best ways to manage and even get rid of your symptoms. When choosing counselors or other professionals, ask if they have experience in treating Postpartum Depression.

**Focus on wellness.** An important step toward treating Postpartum Depression is taking care of your body. A healthy diet and exercise can help you gain your lost energy and feel strong. Try these things:

- Food
  - Eat breakfast in the morning to start your day right.
  - Eat a variety of foods from all food groups, including 2 servings of fruit and 3 servings of vegetables daily.
  - Choose healthy snacks like non-fat milk, yogurt, fruit, and nuts.
  - Do not drink alcohol.
- Exercise
  - Invite your friends to go on walks with you.
  - Try a new activity such as swimming or biking.
  - Take time to stretch and strengthen your muscles.

By doing the things that are most important to you and letting go of what is least important, you can clear your mind to focus on your own health and well-being.

**Take Medicines as You Were Instructed.** Sometimes medicine is needed to treat depression. If your doctor tells you to take medicine, take it as you were instructed.



## **Will Postpartum Depression Affect My Baby and My Family?**

The symptoms of Postpartum Depression often create problems for families. For babies, the negative effects can be serious. If the woman is depressed during pregnancy, there is a greater chance of the baby arriving too small or too early. There can be:

- Language, learning, and behavior problems
- Problems attaching emotionally to others
- Higher risk of having depression themselves
- Increased risk of suicidal behavior
- More acting out to the point of criminal behavior
- Higher risk of having an addiction

Older children suffer when they lose the attention and support of their mother. Loved ones suffer because they do not know what to do or how to help. Other family members are often called upon to fill the gap. Because Postpartum Depression affects the entire family, it is critical that family members recognize the symptoms and help their loved one seek help.

## **Postpartum Depression in New Fathers**

A new father can also experience postpartum depression. One out of ten men have the same postpartum depression symptoms as a new mother with this problem. When a man has this, it is called paternal postpartum depression. An expectant or new father, with emotional problems or symptoms of depression, should talk to their doctor. Depression can be treated.

## **Advice for Fathers, Family, and Friends**

If you know a woman who has the symptoms of Postpartum Depression, there are ways you can help. It is important to be non-judgmental, offer reassurance and hope, and express confidence in the new mother's abilities.

Here are some things you can do:

### **As a Spouse or Partner**

- **Encourage her to seek help.** This is the quickest path to recovery.
- **Offer support and encouragement.** Your positive actions and words can reduce some of her suffering.
- **Listen.** Her feelings are real. Let her express them to you.
- **Allow her to focus on her own needs.** Physical and social activities help women suffering from Postpartum Depression feel stronger, more relaxed, and better about themselves.
- **Take time for yourself.** It is important for spouses and partners to continue with their work, hobbies, and outside relationships.

### **As a Friend or Family Member**

- Ask the mother how you can help, including baby-sitting and house cleaning.
- Let her know you are there for her, even if she does not want to talk.
- Understand that the father may also feel stressed from the changes that come with being a new father or by a partner who is suffering from Postpartum Depression.



## Where Can I Get More Information?

There are many great resources on Postpartum Depression. At your local public library, you can use the Internet or check out books to get information. There are telephone hotlines and support services where you can ask questions. Also, your doctor or nurse may have other resources. The more you understand about Postpartum Depression, the better you will be able to care for yourself and the ones you love.

## Where to Find Help

### **Postpartum Support International**

(800) 944-4PPD or (800) 944-4773

[www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net)

For information on treatment, support groups and resources in the United States and 25 countries.

### **Postpartum Education for Parents**

(805) 967-7636

[www.sbpep.org](http://www.sbpep.org)

A 24-hour support line is available for one-to-one support, from basic infant care to the baby blues and other Postpartum topics. (This may be a Long Distance call.)

### **(800) 311-BABY**

or (800) 311-2229 Spanish: (800) 504-7081

For information on prenatal services in your community.

## More Resources

### **National Mental Health Association**

(800) 969-NMHA or (800) 969-6642

[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

Information on Perinatal Depression, including a locator to find a mental health center or provider in your area.

## **SAMHSA National Mental Health Information Center**

(800) 789-2647

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>

Information on depression, including a locator to find a mental health center in your area.

## **National Women's Health Information Center**

(800) 994-WOMAN or (800) 994-9662

[www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov) or [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)

Frequently asked questions about depression and pregnancy.

## **National Institute of Mental Health**

(866) 615-6464

[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

Links to health information and research studies on depression.

## **American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)**

(800) 762-2264

[www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org) Resources for you and your health care provider.

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