

Postpartum Depression



The first weeks of caring for a newborn baby are more than a full-time job. Although it is often a happy time, your feelings and moods may not be what you expected. Many women experience "baby blues." Here are some tips to help you understand when feelings of sadness are normal, and when you should call your health care provider.

What are the baby blues?

As many as 3 of every 4 women will have short periods of mood swings, crying, or feeling cranky or restless during the first weeks after birth. These feelings can be worse when you are tired or anxious. Women who have the baby blues often say they feel like crying but don't know why. Baby blues usually happen in the first or second week postpartum (after you give birth) and last less than a week. If you are not sleeping, becoming more upset, don't feel like you can take care of your baby, or your sadness lasts 2 weeks or more, call your health care provider.

What is postpartum depression?

About one in every 5 women will develop depression during the first few months postpartum that may be mild, moderate, or severe. Women who have postpartum depression may have some of these symptoms:

- Feeling guilty
- Not able to enjoy your baby and feeling like you are not bonding with your baby
- Not able to sleep, even when the baby is sleeping
- Sleeping too much and feeling too tired to get out of bed
- Feeling overwhelmed and not able to do what you need to during the day
- Not able to concentrate
- Don't feel like eating
- Feeling like you are not normal or not yourself anymore
- Not able to make decisions
- Feeling like a failure as a mother
- Feeling lonely or all alone
- Thinking your baby might be better off without you

If you have any of these symptoms, call your health care provider!

Which symptoms of postpartum depression are dangerous?

Sometimes a woman with postpartum depression will have thoughts of harming herself or her baby. If you find yourself thinking about hurting yourself or your baby, call your health care provider immediately.

What is postpartum psychosis?

Postpartum psychosis is a rare severe form of mental illness that begins during the postpartum period. Women who have postpartum psychosis may hear or see things that are not really there, and they act strangely. This may only be noted by a family member. Women who have postpartum psychosis may think that the baby is being harmed even if the baby is not in danger. This is a true emergency as this woman may hurt herself or hurt her baby. If you have thoughts of wanting to hurt yourself or your baby, call 911 and have someone you trust stay with you until help arrives.

Who is likely to have postpartum depression?

Postpartum depression can happen to any woman after giving birth. The exact cause is probably from many factors, including hormone changes after birth that can affect how the brain works. Women with a personal history of anxiety or depression (even times of just feeling low) or stressful life events, or with a family history of depression are more likely to have postpartum depression. If you think that any of these risks apply to you, talk with your health care provider before your labor and birth. Planning ahead can help prevent problems that occur during depression after birth.



What will help me if I have postpartum depression?

Eating well

- Women who are depressed after birth often don't feel like eating or making meals. The body needs good food to heal, so every effort should be made to eat well. Your family and friends can help you eat well.
- A multivitamin and Omega-3 supplement will provide some of your basic needs for vitamins.
- Fluids are important for your health and for breastfeeding. Drinking 8 to 10 glasses of water every day will help both you and your baby.
- Don't drink alcohol because it can make postpartum depression worse.

Understanding

- Women who are depressed after having a baby feel like their world has come to an end and often feel very guilty and ashamed. This is not your fault.
- It is important for your family and friends to understand that postpartum depression can happen to anyone.
- Your health care provider and a therapist can help you cope with the depression and get better.
- Support groups or group activities help some women. Other women who have had postpartum depression understand what you are going through.

Rest

- Sleep is very important for health and healing. Most women with postpartum depression have a hard time sleeping.
- Try different things to help you sleep, such as a warm bath before bedtime, massage, relaxation techniques, or meditation.
- If you are breastfeeding, you may need assistance with one night feeding in order to get some uninterrupted sleep. Call for help if you go without sleep for more than 2 days.

Things that made you happy in the past

- Try to do something that made you happy before you had postpartum depression, such as practicing your faith or religion, listening to music, going out with a friend, or exercising.

Exercise

- Exercise helps your brain work and produces hormones that help you feel better.
- Take small steps to increase your activity regularly. Family and friends can help with short walks or take care of your baby while you exercise.

For More Information

Postpartum Support International

Facts about postpartum depression and phone numbers for resources in each state.

www.postpartum.net

Support Helpline: 800-944-4773

PubMed Health

Depression After Childbirth

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0005000/>

March of Dimes

Postpartum Depression

<http://www.marchofdimes.com/pregnancy/postpartum-depression.aspx>

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