

Postpartum depression

Many women experience some level of emotional sadness or anxiety before or after childbirth. These emotions typically fade away soon after childbirth. Stronger emotional feelings of sadness, anxiety and depression that last longer and are more severe are signs of postpartum depression.

What is postpartum depression?

It is a serious mental health problem characterized by a prolonged period of emotional disturbance, occurring at the time of child birth.¹

Postpartum depression may be caused by the changes in hormone levels that occur after pregnancy.

Any woman who has gone through childbirth can get postpartum depression. Giving birth brings on many physical and emotional changes which can also cause postpartum depression. Women may struggle with the physical pain from delivery or the difficulty of losing the baby weight. The stress of a newborn can also take a toll. New mothers are often sleep deprived and these adjustments can be difficult for a woman to balance.

Signs and symptoms

Postpartum depression may appear as the “baby blues” but postpartum depression signs and symptoms are more intense and last longer which will eventually interfere with normal day-to-day activities, including caring for a baby.

Some of the symptoms include:

- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia
- Intense irritability and anger
- Extremely tired
- Loss of interest in sex
- Lack of joy in life
- Extreme mood swings
- Feeling shameful, guilty or inadequate
- Difficulty bonding with the new baby
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Thoughts of harming oneself or the baby.

How can postpartum depression affect the baby?

Women who have postpartum depression may have a more difficult time taking care of a newborn baby. If postpartum depression is untreated there could be impacts to the baby.



It is estimated that between 9 – 16% of new moms will experience postpartum depression.²

Some of these may include:

- **Behavioral problems.** Children may be more likely to develop behavioral problems as they become older.
- **Delays in cognitive development.** Development could be delayed in a baby and as the child grows, there might be delays in walking, talking and other key developmental milestones.
- **Social challenges.** A child of a depressed mother may have difficulty establishing secure relationships. It might be difficult to make friends at school and may become socially withdrawn.
- **Emotional challenges.** Some studies have shown that children of depressed mothers have lower self-esteem and may become more anxious, fearful and are less independent.
- **Depression.** There is an increased risk for a child to develop depression early in life.

Self-help for postpartum depression

A critical step for dealing with postpartum depression is to get help from a doctor or professional. Treatment for postpartum depression is extremely easy and effective. In addition to getting professional help, there are some life style changes that a woman can do to help deal with postpartum depression.

Some lifestyle changes may include:

- **Get sleep.** Taking care of a newborn baby may take a toll on sleep but it is extremely important to get plenty of rest. Poor sleep can make depression worse. Find time to take a nap or rest whenever possible.
- **Take time for you.** Set aside quality time for yourself to relax and take a break. Take a long shower or enjoy a hot cup of tea while reading a book.
- **Asking for help.** Often new mothers feel that they have to do everything. Accept help from others.
- **Eat a balanced diet.** When depressed, people often ignore their diet. It is important to eat healthy meals regularly especially if nursing a newborn baby.
- **Get outside in the sun.** Taking time to get outside can increase your mood and make you feel better and refreshed. Take 10 or 15 minutes and get outside.
- **Find time to exercise.** After having a baby your body needs time to recover. You can begin slow and start walking 30 minutes a day. Taking time to get back up and move around can make you feel better and can have a positive impact on depression.



How to help someone you know dealing with postpartum depression

If someone you know is experiencing postpartum depression, the best thing to do is offer support. Offer to give her a break from taking care of the new baby, be a good listener when she needs to talk, and be patient and understanding.

Resources

Postpartum depression facts

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/postpartum-depression-facts/index.shtml

Treating postpartum depression

www.apa.org/monitor/2011/02/postpartum.aspx

1. www.apa.org
2. American Psychological Association, www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/depression/postpartum.aspx

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