

Coping With Postpartum Depression

If you have been feeling a bit down emotionally after the birth of your baby, you may have the "baby blues," a brief but common condition that affects about one in seven new mothers. Occasionally, these blues linger for weeks, and the symptoms become more severe; if this happens, you may be experiencing postpartum depression. Do not be afraid to seek help; this condition can be managed and overcome with the right treatment.

Understanding Postpartum Depression

For many mothers, the days following the delivery of their child can be stressful and exhausting. Doctors call this feeling the "baby blues," a relatively mild form of depression characterized by sadness and anxiety. It usually begins in the days immediately following childbirth and goes away naturally within a couple of weeks.

It is normal to feel a little depressed after this major life event; however, for up to 20 percent of new mothers, the "baby blues" turns into something more serious: postpartum depression. Symptoms of this type of depression can last for months. Symptoms and signs often include:

- Feelings of severe sadness
- Frequent and extended periods of uncontrollable crying
- Irritability
- Fatigue and lack of energy
- Lack of concentration and loss of memory
- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia and other sleep disturbances
- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Lack of interest in the baby
- Lack of interest in pleasurable activities
- Extreme anxiety*
- Panic attacks*
- Obsessive-compulsive behavior*
- Suicidal thoughts*

(*These symptoms are rare.)

Postpartum depression often causes feelings of lethargy, listlessness and emotional detachment from the new baby. The mother may also feel overwhelmed by the new responsibilities and incapacitated in her new role. She may view herself as a bad, unfit mother. These are normal and common experiences of women experiencing this syndrome.

Postpartum depression can affect any new mother, regardless of age, race or socioeconomic condition. Scientists are not exactly sure what causes the condition, but they do believe several factors may trigger its symptoms:

- **A change in hormone levels:** Hormones such as progesterone and estrogen are at dramatically high levels during pregnancy. Following childbirth, these levels drop sharply, affecting a woman's mood and temperament.
- **Stress:** Childbirth is a naturally stressful time, but it can be all the more stressful when factors such as career pressures, life transitions, marital difficulties, illness or financial worries are also involved.
- **History of mental illness:** A woman who previously suffered from depression, postpartum depression with an earlier child, bipolar disorder or other forms of mental illness may be more susceptible to postpartum depression. A family history of depression or other mental illness may also be a predisposing factor that triggers postpartum depression.

Postpartum depression often goes undiagnosed and untreated. Many women refuse to seek help for these symptoms, fearing that acknowledging a problem or consulting a doctor for treatment will be viewed as a sign of weakness or incompetence as a mother. They may feel too guilty to reveal their emotions to anyone, even their husbands or friends. However, if postpartum depression is left untreated, symptoms can often worsen and become both debilitating and dangerous.

Treatment

The good news is that postpartum depression responds very well to treatment. If you have experienced any of the aforementioned symptoms for longer than two weeks following the birth of your child, consult your doctor or obstetrician/gynecologist: He or she can refer you to a specialist who can treat your condition, or they may recommend the following treatments:

- **Antidepressant medications:** If you are breastfeeding, ask your doctor about the potential risks involved first.
- **Talk therapy:** By talking to a professional therapist about your problems, you can learn ways to identify concerns, resolve psychological conflicts and manage the symptoms of postpartum depression.
- **A support group:** Many mothers benefit from reaching out to and accepting support from other mothers dealing with postpartum depression.

Depression screenings for adults must be covered under the Affordable Care Act, without your having to pay a co-payment or co-insurance or meet your deductible. This applies only when these services are delivered by a network provider, and some other restrictions may apply.

Coping Tips

New mothers experiencing the "baby blues" or postpartum depression should consider these coping tips in the weeks following the delivery:

- **Enlist help and support:** Do not be afraid to ask family members and friends for child care assistance, especially in the days right after birth when you will likely be exhausted and recuperating from delivery. Take advantage of loved ones who offer their help.
- **Shift your priorities:** Concentrate only on the baby and yourself. Put aside all worries about housekeeping, making meals, getting back to work and fulfilling all of the little parenting details. Do not worry about being an absolutely perfect mom; do the best job you can with the strength and capabilities you have.
- **Take one day at a time:** It is easy for a new mother to think ahead and start fretting about upcoming events and tasks that may be piling up. If you or your baby are having a tough day, you may feel pessimistic, like your troubles will continue into tomorrow or the next day. Forget about the past and the future, and stay focused calmly on the present. Try to appreciate the small surprises and little joys that each day brings.
- **Get in sync with the baby's cycle:** Try to sleep when your infant sleeps. Be prepared for regular feeding times, and ask your spouse or a friend to stock the house with all of the necessary supplies.
- **Do things for yourself, too:** Try to take the time to get away from your new parent responsibilities for a few hours. Take a warm, private bath. When your body has recuperated, try to exercise a bit (proper aerobic exercise has been shown to elevate moods). Get out and see a movie with your husband or a friend, leaving the baby in the care of a trusted sitter.

If you feel sad and overwhelmed after the delivery of your child, do not hesitate to seek help.

Resources

- HealthCare.gov: www.healthcare.gov
- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov
- WomensHealth.gov: www.womenshealth.gov

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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