

What You Should Know About Postpartum Depression

Most new mothers experience some mood swings or anxiety when they bring home the new baby. Commonly termed “baby blues,” these begin within hours or days of the birth. Physical and hormonal changes in your body, emotional factors related to caring for the baby and disrupted routines, and exhaustion contribute to feelings of being sad or overwhelmed. Baby blues may come and go for up to about 4 weeks and then usually disappear.

Some women experience greater symptoms of depression that do not go away. Postpartum depression (PPD) is a serious illness in which the new mother may experience feelings of sadness, anger, irritability, or worthlessness; no energy or motivation; eating too much or too little; sleep problems (beyond the normal baby awakenings); loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities; difficulty concentrating or making decisions; or fear of “going crazy.” She may also show a lack of interest in the baby or have a fear of harming herself or the baby.

Without treatment, a woman with PPD may feel like she is a “bad mother,” and she may think there is no hope.

How do I know if I have PPD?

If you have any of the symptoms listed above, get help right away. Your health care clinician can assess whether your symptoms are serious. He or she may give you a screening test with questions that have been shown to pinpoint PPD. If you don't have the energy or desire to go for the office visit, tell someone close to you that you need help, and ask the person to call to make an appointment. Be open with the clinician in describing your symptoms.

Will PPD go away on its own?

PPD is a medical condition that involves the brain. Women with PPD often need medication and/or counseling therapy in order to get well. Getting well is important for you and your baby. The first year of life is a time of huge growth; if the mother is unable to interact with her child, there can be delays in language and brain development, problems with bonding and behavior, and increased crying. The sooner PPD is treated, the sooner the baby can have a healthy mom and you can begin to enjoy motherhood.



What does mental health counseling provide?

Talking to a therapist, psychologist, or social worker may help you learn how depression makes you think, feel, and act. You may be able to change the way you respond to depression. For example, the counselor may give you an action plan to work on areas to feel better. The counselor will give you support to reach your goals. This type of talk therapy is called cognitive behavioral therapy or interpersonal therapy and is provided by a licensed mental health specialist.

What kind of medications might help?

Antidepressants are prescription drugs that may help improve your mood, sleep, appetite, and concentration. There are several available, and your clinician will discuss benefits and possible side effects of ones that might be right for you. Some are safe to use with breastfeeding.

What else can I do?

Check out online resources that offer information and support. Some of these include www.postpartum.net and www.womenshealth.gov.

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