

Mood Changes After Childbirth*

The “Baby Blues” and Postpartum Depression

Are mood changes common after childbirth?

Yes. After having a baby, *most* women have mood swings. One minute, they feel happy, and the next minute start to cry. They may feel a little depressed, have a hard time concentrating, lose their appetite or find that they can't sleep well even when the baby is asleep. These symptoms usually start around three or four days after delivery and may last several days. These mood changes may be due to changing hormone levels during pregnancy and right after delivery.

What are the “baby blues”?

If you're a new mother and have any of these symptoms, you probably have the “baby blues.” The blues are considered a *normal* part of early motherhood, and usually go away within 10 days after delivery. However, some women have symptoms that are worse or that last longer. This is called “postpartum depression.”

What is postpartum depression?

Postpartum depression is an illness which can be treated. Symptoms of postpartum depression include:

- excessive worry
- loss of interest or pleasure in life
- difficulty sleeping (usually a hard time sleeping even when your baby sleeps)
- loss of energy
- weight loss
- feeling worthless or overly guilty
- worrying about hurting your baby
- having thoughts about hurting yourself

Although some women get depressed right after delivery, others don't feel “down” until several weeks or months later.

Who gets postpartum depression?

It is more likely to develop if you have had any of the following:

- personal or family history of previous postpartum depression or depressive disorder not related to pregnancy
- difficulties in your marriage
- few family members or friends to provide support
- stressful life events during or after pregnancy

Feeling depressed doesn't mean that you're a bad person, or that you did something to bring it on yourself. It's not something you can just “will away.”

How long does postpartum depression last?

It's hard to say. Some women feel better within a few weeks; others feel depressed for many months. Women who have more severe symptoms or have had depression in the past may take longer to get well. Just remember that help is available and that you can get better.

How is it treated?

Much like any other depression, with support, counseling (“talk therapy”) and/or medication.

Can I take antidepressant medication if I'm breastfeeding?

If you take an antidepressant, only a small amount will go into your breast milk and is usually considered safe for your baby. Talk to your doctor about the risks of taking an antidepressant while breastfeeding and which medication may be best for you.

* Epperson CN, Szarkowski K. Patient Information Handout. *Am Fam Physician* 1999;59(8):2259.



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What can I do to help myself?

- Find time to do something for yourself, even if it's only 15 minutes a day. Reading, walking, taking a bath or meditating are some good choices.
- Keep a diary, writing down your feelings as a way of “letting it all out” every day. Once you begin to feel better, you can re-read your diary—this will help you see how much better you are.
- Even if you can only get one thing done in any given day, this is a step in the right direction. There may be days when you can't get anything done. Try not to feel disappointed with yourself when this happens.
- It's OK to feel overwhelmed. Childbirth brings many changes. When you're not feeling like yourself, these changes can seem like too much to cope with.
- Find a support group in your area or contact one of the organizations listed below.

How can my spouse, other family members and friends help?

First, ask them to read this information sheet. By understanding what you're going through, your spouse, family and friends will be better equipped to provide the support and patience that you will need.

Your spouse, in particular, can play an important role in helping you get through this difficult time. Encourage him to come along to visits to your doctor. And, if he's finding it difficult to cope—many fathers feel mixed emotions during this time (e.g., worry, loneliness, anxiety, confusion, anger)—encourage him to talk about openly about how he's feeling. In some areas, there may be support groups available specifically for your spouse.

Your friends and family can also provide practical help with household chores, errands and childcare. Be honest about how much you can do, and ask others to help you. You're not expected to be “supermom.”

Are there other resources to help?

- **Pacific PostPartum Support Society**
Tel: (604) 255-7999
Fax: (604) 255-7588
Website: www.postpartum.org
- **Postpartum Mood Disorder and Anxiety Disorder: A Self-Help Support Network, Resource Guide**
Website: www.chss.iup.edu/postpartum
- **Depression After Delivery**
Website: www.depressionafterdelivery.com
- **MotheRisk (especially good for answering questions about medications)**
Tel: (416) 813-6780
Website: www.motherisk.org



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