

De-mystifying the “Baby Blues”

Becoming a mother can bring joy, but it can also bring unexpected emotions. Many new mothers experience the “baby blues.” This often starts a few days after birth and usually fades within two weeks. It is important to know the difference between the baby blues and postpartum depression. Postpartum depression lasts longer, has stronger symptoms and can make it hard to care for yourself or your baby.

How common postpartum depression is

Postpartum depression, or PPD, is common. Many mothers feel sad, overwhelmed or disconnected after childbirth. These feelings can affect the whole family. Even with growing awareness, some mothers feel alone or ashamed because they think they should feel happy. Having these emotions does not mean a mother is doing anything wrong.

Why mothers are at risk

Many changes can affect a mother’s mood. Hormones shift quickly after birth. Sleep is often disrupted. Mothers may worry about their bodies, their future or how to care for their baby. Society also places pressure on mothers to be perfect. These stresses can make a new mother feel anxious or unsure, which can increase the risk of depression.

Recognizing the symptoms

Signs of postpartum depression can include:

- Ongoing sadness
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Feeling numb or hopeless
- Trouble bonding with the baby
- Feeling like a bad mother
- Thoughts of self-harm or harming the baby

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Up to 1 in 7
mothers feel
depressed after
having a baby.

— National Institutes of Health

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Family members and loved ones play a key role. They can notice changes, offer support and encourage the mother to get help. Partners can make a big difference by listening, staying patient and helping her reach out for care. **Any thoughts of hurting oneself or the baby should be evaluated quickly.**

Treatment and what helps

Postpartum depression can be treated. Many mothers benefit from therapy, where they can talk about their feelings and learn new coping skills. Family therapy can help loved ones understand how to support the mother. Some mothers may need medication. Many antidepressants are safe for breastfeeding. Early treatment often leads to better outcomes.

When to seek help

Mothers should be screened for depression during pregnancy and after birth. If sadness, anxiety or disconnection lasts more than two weeks after delivery, it is important to talk to a health care provider like an OB-GYN or primary care doctor. Asking for help is a strong and brave step.

By creating a supportive environment and talking openly about mental health, we can help more mothers get the care they need.

#MentalHealthMatters

If you or someone you know is struggling with a mental health issue, help is out there. Contact the Mental Health America 24/7 Crisis Text Line (Text MHA to 741-741).

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