

# Postpartum Depression



## What is postpartum depression?

Women's bodies go through several changes during and after pregnancy. Most women will experience a short period of increased sadness, anxiety, or feelings of emptiness in the few days after giving birth. These feelings are called the "baby blues" and usually go away within 1-2 weeks without treatment. However, for some women, these feelings may be more intense, last longer than two weeks, and may interfere with normal function or the ability to care for the baby. These women may have a condition called postpartum depression, which affects approximately 1 in 9 new mothers. Postpartum depression can occur up to one year following delivery but is most common in the first few weeks.

## What are symptoms of postpartum depression?

- ◉ Feeling sad, overwhelmed, irritably, or empty
- ◉ Crying frequently
- ◉ Not feeling interested in or connected to the baby
- ◉ Feeling hopeless, worthless, and/or guilty
- ◉ Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- ◉ Changes in appetite that may lead to changes in weight
- ◉ Feeling tired or fatigued
- ◉ Having difficulty with focus, memory, or making decisions
- ◉ Body aches and pains (e.g., stomach aches, headaches)
- ◉ Withdrawing or isolating from loved ones
- ◉ Having thoughts of hurting yourself or the baby
- ◉ Thoughts of suicide or suicidal attempts

**\*Note:** A very small percentage of women may develop a more serious condition called Postpartum Psychosis in which they develop more severe symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, and paranoia. This condition requires urgent evaluation and treatment to prevent the risk of harm to the mother or the baby.

## What are risk factors for postpartum depression?

Being under age 20	Difficult or traumatic birth	Stressors during pregnancy	Limited support from others
Previous history of depression	Family history of postpartum depression	Difficulty breastfeeding	Unwanted or unplanned pregnancy

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## How is postpartum depression treated?

### Psychotherapy

Therapy can help improve symptoms by teaching effective coping strategies for dealing with the emotional and behavioral impacts of postpartum depression. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), in particular, is an evidenced-based intervention that teaches mothers more effective and balanced ways of thinking and behaving in order to improve their mood and other symptoms.

### Medication

Antidepressant medication may help treat symptoms of postpartum depression. Medication may take several weeks to become fully effective, but many will notice symptom improvement before that. Antidepressants may cause side effects in some people. Always be sure to talk to your doctor about your symptoms and any side effects to determine the best treatment option for you.

## How can I help myself or my loved one?

Many women with postpartum depression feel ashamed and guilty about their symptoms, which often prevents them from telling others and getting the support or treatment that they need. Women often worry that they may be judged for feeling sad when they should be feeling happy, or that they will be perceived as bad mothers for not being able to bond with their babies. It is important to remember that women do not have to suffer with these symptoms alone. In addition to professional treatment the following may be helpful:

Get as much rest and sleep as possible

Accept help with household tasks

Join a new mom support group

Talk about your feelings with your partner

Prioritize your own needs too

Reduce other sources of stress

## Who do I contact to find out more?

Referrals for mental health services can be made by your primary care doctor, OB/GYN, mental health professional, or the mother may self-refer for treatment.



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