

Postpartum Depression

Everyone feels sad sometimes, but these feelings usually pass within a few days. Depression occurs when your feelings of sadness interfere with daily life and may last for weeks or months at a time. Most people, even those with the most severe forms of depression, can get better with treatment.

Postpartum depression is depression that occurs after having a baby. Feelings of postpartum depression are more intense and last longer than those of “baby blues,” a term used to describe the worry, sadness, and tiredness many women experience after having a baby. The baby blues usually go away in three to five days after they start. Symptoms of postpartum depression last longer and are more severe. Postpartum depression usually begins within the first month after childbirth, but it can begin during pregnancy or for up to a year after birth.

If you are feeling symptoms of postpartum depression, you are not alone! About one in nine new mothers will experience this common but serious health condition. Postpartum depression can be treated by your healthcare provider.

Symptoms of Depression

Depression doesn't feel the same for everyone. How often symptoms occur, how long they last, and how intense they may feel can be different for each person.

Symptoms of depression can include:

- Lasting sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feeling hopelessness or pessimistic
- Feeling guilty, worthless or helpless
- Feeling irritable or restless
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- Loss of energy
- Problems concentrating, recalling detail, and making decisions
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little
- Thoughts of or attempts to hurt yourself
- Aches or pains that do not get better with treatment

Symptoms of Postpartum Depression

The symptoms of postpartum depression are similar to symptoms for depression, but may also include:

- Crying more often than usual.
- Feelings of anger.
- Withdrawing from loved ones.
- Feeling numb or disconnected from your baby.
- Not having any interest in the baby, not feeling connected to the baby, or feeling as if your baby is someone else's baby
- Feeling guilty about not being a good mom or doubting your ability to care for the baby.
- Worrying that you will hurt the baby.

Some women don't tell anyone about their symptoms. New mothers may feel embarrassed, ashamed, or guilty about feeling depressed when they are supposed to be happy. They may also worry they will be seen as bad mothers. Any woman can become depressed during pregnancy or after having a baby. It doesn't mean you are a bad mom. You and your baby don't have to suffer. There is help. Your doctor can help you figure out whether your symptoms are caused by depression or something else.



Causes of Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression could be triggered by one or more concerns:

- Rapid hormone changes
- Feeling tired after labor and delivery or from a lack of sleep or broken sleep
- Feeling overwhelmed with a new baby
- Doubting your ability to be a good mother
- Stress from changes in work and home routines
- An unrealistic need to be a perfect mom
- Grief about loss of who they were before having the baby
- Feeling less attractive
- A lack of free time

These feelings are common among new mothers. But when they cause deep, prolonged periods of sadness and hopelessness, you should seek help from a health care provider.

Risk Factors for Depression

Depression can occur among women with a healthy pregnancy and birth but some experiences that may put new mothers at a higher risk for depression include:

- Stressful life events, difficult relationships or money problems
- Low support from family and friends
- Previous history of depression or other mental illness
- Family history of depression or other mental illness
- Unplanned or unwanted pregnancy
- Difficulty getting pregnant
- Being a mom to multiples, like twins, or triplets
- Being a teen mom
- Alcoholism or drug use
- Preterm (before 37 weeks) labor and delivery
- Pregnancy and birth complications with current or previous pregnancy
- Difficulty breastfeeding
- Having a baby who has been hospitalized or has special needs

Treatment

Postpartum depression is treatable and most people get better with treatment. The most common types of treatment for postpartum depression are:

- **Therapy.** During therapy, you talk to a therapist, psychologist, or social worker to learn strategies to change how depression makes you think, feel, and act.
- **Medicine.** There are different types of medicines for postpartum depression. All of them must be prescribed by your doctor or nurse.

These treatments can be used alone or together. Talk with your doctor or nurse about the benefits and risks of taking medicine to treat depression when you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Having depression can affect your baby. If you think you may be depressed, the first step to seeking treatment is to talk to your health care provider. Getting treatment is important for both you and your baby. Taking medicines for depression or going to therapy does not make you a bad mother or a failure. Getting help is a sign of strength.

Your body and mind go through many changes during and after pregnancy. If you feel empty, emotionless, or sad all or most of the time for longer than 2 weeks during or after pregnancy, reach out for help. If you feel like you don't love or care for your baby, you might have postpartum depression. Treatment for depression, such as therapy or medicine, works and will help you and your baby be as healthy as possible in the future.