



# Postpartum Depression and Anxiety

The first weeks of caring for a new baby are a lot of work. During this time, your feelings and moods may not be what you expected. This handout will help you understand when feelings are normal, and when you should call your health care provider.

## What are the baby blues?

As many as 3 in every 4 women will have short periods of feeling sad, crying, or feeling cranky or restless during the first few weeks after giving birth. This may be normal. Babies are fed every few hours, and you will not get a full night of sleep in those first weeks. Also, your body and hormones go through many changes after you give birth. Women who have the baby blues often say they feel like crying but don't know why. Baby blues usually happen in the first or second week postpartum (after you give birth) and last less than a week. If your sadness lasts 2 weeks or more, call your health care provider.

## What is postpartum depression?

About one in every 5 women will develop postpartum depression during the first few months after giving birth. Women who have postpartum depression may have some of these symptoms:

- Feeling guilty
- Not able to enjoy your baby and feeling like you are not bonding with your baby
- Not able to sleep, even when the baby is sleeping
- Sleeping too much and feeling too tired to get out of bed
- Feeling overwhelmed and not able to do what you need to during the day
- Not able to concentrate
- Don't feel like eating
- Feeling like you are not normal or not yourself anymore
- Not able to make decisions
- Feeling like a failure as a mother or that you cannot take care of your baby
- Feeling lonely or all alone
- Thinking your baby might be better off without you

If you have any of these symptoms, tell someone you trust and call your health care provider right away!

## What is postpartum anxiety?

About one in every 10 women will develop postpartum anxiety during the first few months after giving birth. Women who have postpartum anxiety may have some of these symptoms:

- Constant worry
- Racing thoughts
- Unable to sit still
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Don't feel like eating
- Feeling that something bad is going to happen
- Physical symptoms like dizziness, hot flashes, and nausea

If you have any of these symptoms, tell someone you trust and call your health care provider right away!

## Which symptoms of postpartum depression and anxiety are dangerous?

Sometimes a woman with postpartum depression and/or anxiety will have thoughts of harming herself or her baby. If you have thoughts of wanting to hurt yourself or your baby, tell someone you trust and



call your health care provider immediately. You can also call 911 or one of the emergency hotlines listed below.

### **Who is likely to have postpartum depression or anxiety?**

Postpartum depression or anxiety can happen to any woman. Postpartum depression and anxiety sometimes happen together. Women with a personal or family history of anxiety or depression and women who have had stressful life events are more likely to have postpartum depression and/or anxiety. If you have any of these risks, talk with your health care provider before you give birth.

**Planning ahead can help prevent problems after birth.** If you have a history of depression or anxiety or someone in your family had one of these problems, it is important to plan ahead for how you can get help when you need it. If you can, see a counselor or mental health care provider before you give birth. If a mental health care provider is not available, you can work with your prenatal care provider to make a plan. You may not end up needing the extra help, but it is good to have someone available in case you need them.

### **How can a health care provider help treat postpartum depression or anxiety?**

If you have postpartum depression or anxiety, it is important to get help. Treatments for these problems include therapy (counseling) and medication. Your health care provider can help you decide what treatment is best for you.

### **How can I help myself treat postpartum depression or anxiety?**

Women who are depressed or anxious after having a baby may feel guilty and ashamed. You are not alone, and this is not your fault. It is important for your family and friends to understand that postpartum depression and/or anxiety can happen to anyone. Here are some things you can do to help yourself:

- Support groups or group activities help some women. Other women who have had postpartum depression and/or anxiety understand what you are going through.
- Sleep is very important for health and healing. Most women with postpartum depression and/or anxiety can have a hard time sleeping. Try different things to help you sleep, such as a warm bath before bedtime, massage, relaxation techniques, or meditation.
- If you are breastfeeding, you may need help with night feeding in order to get some uninterrupted sleep.
- Exercise produces hormones that help you feel better. Even a small amount of activity helps. Family and friends can help with short walks or take care of your baby while you exercise.
- Don't drink alcohol because it can make postpartum depression worse.
- Try to do something that made you happy before you had postpartum depression and/or anxiety, such as listening to music, doing something with a friend, or practicing your faith or religion.

#### **For More Information**

##### **Postpartum Support International**

[www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net)

Support Helpline: 800-944-4773

##### **Emergency Hotlines (available all the time, 24/7)**

National Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741 about any type of crisis

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 8.1

Approved December 2018. This handout replaces "Postpartum Depression" published in Volume 58, Number 6, November/December 2013.

*This handout may be reproduced for noncommercial use by health care professionals to share with clients, but modifications to the handout are not permitted. The information and recommendations in this handout are not a substitute for health care. Consult your health care provider for information specific to you and your health.*