
Understanding Postpartum Depression

It's common for new moms to feel tired and moody after having a baby. But if you have very strong feelings of sadness or anger, or have trouble doing your normal daily tasks, you may have a serious mood disorder called postpartum depression. Left untreated, it may stop you from bonding with your baby. It's important to see your healthcare provider right away and get help.

What is postpartum depression?

Postpartum depression is a serious mood disorder that affects some women after giving birth. About 3 in 20 new moms have this condition. Symptoms can include feeling very intense sadness, tiredness, and anxiety. These feelings can become so strong that it's hard to do your normal daily tasks. You may find it hard to take care of yourself and your baby.

Symptoms may start about 1 to 3 weeks after your baby is born. But they can also appear up to a year later. If you or the people around you think you may have postpartum depression, or if you have symptoms for more than 2 weeks, call your healthcare provider right away. Treatment is available.

Is it postpartum depression or the baby blues?

Postpartum depression is different than the "baby blues" (postpartum blues). The baby blues is a common condition that many new moms have soon after giving birth. They may feel sad, moody, or anxious. But these feelings go away in about 2 weeks. If you still have these feelings after 2 weeks, or if you start to feel worse at any time, call your healthcare provider. They will evaluate you to see if you have postpartum depression. It's important to get treated right away.

What causes postpartum depression?

Postpartum depression is likely caused by a mix of physical and emotional factors. These include:

- Changing hormone levels. Right after you have a baby, your levels of estrogen and progesterone drop. This sudden change may set off depression. Your thyroid hormone levels may also drop at the same time.
- Depression. You may be at greater risk if you have a history of depression, or if you are currently being treated for depression.
- Extreme tiredness (fatigue). It can take a few weeks to physically recover from giving birth. In addition, most new moms don't get the rest or sleep they need.
- Lifestyle issues. Other stressors may also play a role. These can include money, health, or relationship problems, or not getting support from friends or family.

Symptoms of postpartum depression

Symptoms may vary. But they are very intense and may include:

- Feeling very tired, with no energy (fatigue)

- Crying often or for no reason
- Feeling very sad, anxious, or overwhelmed
- Being moody
- Feeling that you can't take care of your baby
- Sleeping too much, or not sleeping
- Having trouble eating
- Having trouble making decisions and focusing
- Not being able to do your normal daily tasks
- Not being interested in your baby
- Not wanting to be around family or friends
- Wanting to hurt yourself or your baby

Diagnosing postpartum depression

Early diagnosis and treatment are important. Only a healthcare provider can diagnose you. Call your provider if you have symptoms of depression, or you have trouble doing your normal activities, for longer than 2 weeks.

Your provider will talk with you and ask for a health history. You may be asked to fill out a form that helps to identify depression. You may also have some blood tests done. These are used to find out if your symptoms may be caused by a thyroid disorder or other health condition.

If not treated, postpartum depression can have serious effects for you and your baby. Women with this condition who are not treated:

- Are less likely to breastfeed their baby
- May not bond with their baby
- Are less likely to take good care of their baby
- Are more likely to have problems with their partner
- May have thoughts of harming themselves
- May have thoughts of harming their baby

Are you at risk for postpartum depression?

You are more at risk for this condition if you have:

- A history of depression (including postpartum depression in a past pregnancy)
- A family member with depression
- A history of alcohol or drug abuse

- Had a difficult childbirth, such as a premature birth
- A baby with health problems or special needs
- No emotional support from your partner, family, or friends
- Other stresses in your life, such as money or relationship problems
- Mixed feelings about this pregnancy, such as with an unplanned pregnancy

Treatment for postpartum depression



Treatment is available. Your healthcare provider can help you decide on the best treatment option for you. They may advise:

- **Medicine.** Antidepressants are the main type of medicine for postpartum depression. These medicines affect the brain chemicals that help control moods. Let your provider know if you are breastfeeding. Most antidepressants are considered safe to use when breastfeeding.
- **Talk therapy (counseling or psychotherapy)** . This treatment involves talking with a mental health provider about your feelings and issues that might add to the depression. Therapy may be done in private sessions with just you and the provider. Or it may be done in group sessions with other new parents. You and your mental health provider may talk about ways you can be successful with:
 - Your new role and changing relationships with others
 - Balancing your well-being while caring for your baby

Medicine and talk therapy can be used alone or together.

Joining a support group for moms with this condition may also help you cope. Check online for support groups in your area, or ask your healthcare provider for suggestions.

Managing postpartum depression

In addition to seeing your healthcare provider and getting treatment, it's important to take care of yourself. Tell your family and friends how you are feeling and what kind of help or support you need. Make sure to also:

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- Get enough sleep
 - Eat healthy foods
 - Rest when your baby takes a nap
 - Get some light exercise
 - Don't try to do chores
 - Ask for and accept any help with meals, shopping, and laundry

Call 988 in a crisis

If you have thoughts of harming yourself or others, call or text 988 now. You will be connected to trained crisis counselors at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. An online chat option is also available at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org. Lifeline is free and available 24/7.

To learn more

Find more information at:

- [Postpartum Support International at www.postpartum.net](https://www.postpartum.net)
- [Office on Women's Health at www.womenshealth.gov](https://www.womenshealth.gov)