

For nine months you have dreamed of what life will be like when your baby finally arrives. Visions of the perfect birth, a sweet and sleeping newborn, and being surrounded by love and happiness have been playing through your mind. You probably have not spent much time thinking about how emotionally and physically draining the early weeks of caring for a newborn may be. So what are these alien and unwanted feelings that happen when you are finally home with your new baby? Everything is supposed to be perfect, but you suddenly feel overwhelmed and sad.

Baby Blues

What you are probably experiencing is called the “baby blues.” Baby blues are *mild, temporary* moodiness. Over 70 percent of postpartum women experience some form of baby blues.¹ Baby blues can last a few hours, several days, or as long as two weeks. Symptoms include *sudden* tearfulness, irritability, health *anxiety*, sleeplessness, impaired concentration, a feeling of isolation, and headaches.² Some of these feelings can be overwhelming and may be the result of a lack of sleep combined with the sharp drop in pregnancy hormones that women experience shortly after giving birth. A birth that did not go as you rehearsed, pain and soreness after delivery, or a longer recovery from a C-section may also contribute to feelings of baby blues. Baby blues usually resolve on their own within one to two weeks with support from loved ones, patience, and rest, and do not require medical intervention. Baby blues are not the same thing as postpartum depression.

Postpartum Depression or Anxiety

Many women experience a more disabling and persistent form of depression called postpartum depression (PPD).³ The symptoms of PPD last *longer* and are more *severe*. Postpartum depression can begin anytime within the first year after childbirth. Along with PPD, you may also experience postpartum anxiety, where you feel overwhelmed or worry excessively about things that wouldn’t normally bother you. If you experience postpartum depression or anxiety, you may have any of the symptoms of baby blues along with thoughts of harming yourself or the baby or thoughts of not caring about the baby at all.

How Do I Know?

- Have your baby blues lasted longer than two weeks?
- Is your depression or anxiety getting more intense?
- Did your symptoms of depression begin after delivery, even months after?
- Is it hard for you to get things done?
- Is your baby colicky or have high needs?
- Do you feel like you can’t care for yourself or your baby?
- Do you have thoughts of harming yourself or your baby?

Call your doctor if your answer is yes to any of these questions. Your provider can test for PPD and anxiety and can refer you for services or treatments. Some mothers don’t tell anyone about what they may be feeling because they are embarrassed, scared, or may feel guilty about being sad. Some mothers fear being judged as unfit to parent if they are honest about the feelings they are struggling through.

Postpartum depression or anxiety can affect *any* woman, regardless of race, income, or education.⁴ PPD and/or anxiety occurs regardless of feeding methods, the baby’s health, and the number of children you have had. However, you should be aware that there are some risk factors that may predispose you to PPD. These include a prior history

of depression, relationship conflicts, or suffering a miscarriage. You may also have a higher risk of PPD if you are young, abuse alcohol or drugs, have negative feelings about being a mom, have financial problems, or are stressed or in mourning.

Helpful Tips

Untreated postpartum depression and anxiety interferes with a woman's ability to care for her baby. It is important that you discuss treatments for your depression and/or anxiety with your doctor. Your doctor should be involved in your care, but in addition to this, there are practical ways to improve your ability to function at home and to improve your mood.

- **Nest in with your baby.** Spend the first few weeks bonding with your new baby, learning how to be a family together. Temporarily shelve all other responsibilities that take your time and energy.
- **Rest as much as you can.** Sleep when the baby is sleeping. This is the most practical, yet probably the most ignored advice that new mothers get.
- **Ask for help.** Having a trusted friend or loved one over to hold your baby for an hour or so while you nap or take a long bath can do wonders for your well-being.
- **Try not to spend much time alone.** Surround yourself with supportive people. Talk to other mothers. You can learn from each other, and their experiences can be reassuring.
- **Get out occasionally for walks with your baby.** Getting some fresh air can be an excellent mood lifter.
- **Eat well.** Inadequate nutrition feeds more depression. Good nutrition is important for your physical health and recovery. Proper nutrition is also important for the production of breast milk.
- **Practice good hygiene.** Take a shower and get dressed every day.

A support group can help you cope with your depression.

Depression after Delivery
(800) 944-4PPD

National Women's Health Information Center
(800) 994-9662

All babies deserve the chance to have a healthy mom, and you deserve the chance to enjoy life and your children.

If you are feeling depressed after having a baby, don't suffer alone. Please tell a loved one and call your provider right away.

Resources include:

1. American Pregnancy Association. Baby Blues. Found at <http://americanpregnancy.org/first-year-of-life/baby-blues/>, accessed 9-26-2018, updated August 2015.
2. Beck CT. Postpartum Depression: It Isn't Just the Blues. *Am J Nurs*. May 2006;106(5):40-50; quiz 50-1.
3. American Academy of Pediatrics. Depression During & After Pregnancy: You Are Not Alone Found at <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/prenatal/delivery-beyond/Pages/Under-standing-Motherhood-and-Mood-Baby-Blues-and-Beyond.aspx>, accessed 9-26-2018, updated May 1, 2016.
4. American Psychological Association. Postpartum Depression. Found at <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/resources/reports/postpartum-depression.aspx>, accessed 9-26-2018.