



Pregnancy: How to Deal With Postpartum Depression

Many women get the “baby blues” during the first few days after childbirth. You may lose sleep, feel irritable, cry easily, or feel happy one minute and sad the next. The changes in your hormones are one cause of these feelings. Stress from the demands of a new

baby and visits from relatives or other family needs also may affect how you feel. The “baby blues,” or postpartum blues, usually peak around the fourth day and then ease up in less than 2 weeks.

But sometimes women have more than the “baby blues.” This is called postpartum depression. It can make you feel very sad, hopeless, and worthless. You may have trouble caring for and bonding with your baby.

Postpartum depression can follow postpartum blues or happen months after childbirth or pregnancy loss. In some cases, symptoms peak after slowly building for 3 or 4 months.

Postpartum depression is serious. If during any 2-week period you feel depressed or hopeless, lose pleasure in everyday things, do not feel hungry, have trouble sleeping, or are not able to focus, see your doctor.

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS.

It is a medical problem that needs to be treated. If you have symptoms, it's important to see your doctor. The sooner you get treatment, the better your chance for a quick and full recovery.

Treatment includes counseling and antidepressant medicines. Women with milder depression may be able to get better with counseling alone. But many women need counseling and medicine.

What can you do at home?

Here are some ways to care for yourself:

- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Eat a balanced diet to keep up your energy.
- Get regular daily exercise, such as walks, to help improve your mood.
- Get as much sunlight as possible. Keep your shades and curtains open, and get outside as much as you can.
- Avoid using alcohol or other substances to feel better.
- Get as much rest and sleep as possible, and avoid doing too much. Being too tired can increase depression.
- Schedule outings and visits with friends and family. Ask them to call you regularly so that you do not feel alone.

- Ask for help with preparing food and other daily tasks. Family and friends are often happy to help.
- Be honest with yourself and those who care about you. Tell them about your struggle.
- Join a support group.

Can you take antidepressants while you breastfeed?

Breastfeeding is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your baby. It provides many health benefits for both of you.

But you may have concerns about breastfeeding while taking antidepressant medicines. When you take any medicine, you and your doctor must weigh the benefits of the medicine against the possible risks.

All antidepressants can pass to the baby through breast milk, but the amount varies depending on the medicine or the person. Talk to your doctor about which antidepressant medicine is the best choice.

WHEN TO CALL A DOCTOR

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You think you cannot keep from harming yourself, your baby, or another person.
- Someone you know is about to attempt or is attempting suicide. You can also call the national suicide hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

Call your doctor now or seek medical care right away if:

- You are having trouble caring for yourself or your baby.
- You have signs of paranoia that can occur with postpartum depression. For example, you fear that someone is watching you, stealing from you, or reading your mind.
- You hear voices.
- You or someone you know has depression and:
 - Starts to give away his or her possessions.
 - Uses illegal drugs or drinks a lot of alcohol.
 - Talks or writes about death, including writing suicide notes and talking about guns, knives, or pills.
 - Starts to spend a lot of time alone.
 - Acts very aggressively or suddenly appears calm.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if you have any problems.

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