

# POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION



## A NEW PARENT'S EMOTIONS

*best start  
meilleur départ*

Ontario's maternal, newborn and early  
child development resource centre

Centre de ressources sur la maternité,  
les nouveau-nés et le développement  
des jeunes enfants de l'Ontario

## A New Parent's Emotions

20% or more women experience anxiety and/or depression after the birth or adoption of a child. Men can also experience emotional difficulty, especially if their partner is depressed.

If symptoms last longer than 2 weeks or are severe enough to interfere with your daily routine, it is time to seek help.

**It's not your fault.  
It can happen to anyone.  
There is help...  
and you will get better.**



Having a baby can be a wonderful time, but it can also cause a lot of stress. Pregnancy and the period following birth bring physical, emotional and social changes. In becoming parents, women and men experience major adjustments to their roles and their relationships with partners and others.

Postpartum mood disorders are one of the most common complications of pregnancy. There are different types of postpartum mood disorders that have different symptoms and range from mild to severe. The causes of postpartum mood disorders are not fully understood. Physical, hormonal and psychological changes after becoming a parent affect mood and behavior. Isolation, lack of support and previous experiences of physical, emotional or sexual abuse may also be a factor.

POSTPARTUM MOOD DISORDER	SYMPTOMS
<p><b>Postpartum “Blues”</b></p> <p>Is considered normal. Affects up to 80% of new mothers. Occurs 3 to 4 days after birth. Can last up to 2 weeks. With good physical care and emotional support, these symptoms will go away. No treatment is required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crying spells</li> <li>• Feeling sad</li> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• Frustration</li> </ul>
<p><b>Postpartum Anxiety</b></p> <p>May start during pregnancy or after birth. Symptoms may start suddenly or slowly. With support and reassurance these can decrease.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panic attacks</li> <li>• Shortness of breath, chest pains, dizziness or sweating</li> <li>• Excessive worrying about the baby’s or your own health</li> </ul>
<p><b>Postpartum Depression</b></p> <p>Affects up to 20% of new mothers. May develop anytime within the first year after birth. Usually occurs in the first 2 to 4 months. If untreated, it can worsen and last well into the second year. Fathers at greater risk for depression if the mother is depressed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More intense and longer lasting symptoms than the postpartum blues</li> <li>• Feelings of hopelessness</li> <li>• Anxiety or panic attacks</li> <li>• Changes in eating &amp; sleeping</li> <li>• Having the opportunity to sleep but unable to do so</li> <li>• Fearing that you might hurt yourself or your baby</li> </ul>
<p><b>Postpartum “Pinks” (mania)</b></p> <p>Appear to be coping extremely well but at risk to crash into a deep depression.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extremely energetic and multitasking</li> <li>• Feeling that they could go through labour and delivery all over again right away</li> </ul>
<p><b>Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder</b></p> <p>Onset is the same as Postpartum Depression. Symptoms related to scary thoughts can be very disturbing. Those suffering from this are least likely to harm their baby. Scary thoughts often disappear when they are brought out into the open and discussed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having repeated scary thoughts about the baby such as seeing the baby drown or seeing the baby fall down the stairs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Postpartum Psychosis</b></p> <p>Occurs in 1 to 2 in 1,000 births. Least common mood disorder but is the most serious. Is a medical emergency. Often requires hospitalization and medication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hallucinations (hearing or seeing things)</li> <li>• Paranoia</li> <li>• Extreme behavior out of the ordinary</li> </ul>



**If you or someone you know is experiencing any of the symptoms, get help now...**

**Contact your health care provider (such as a doctor, nurse or midwife). If you require immediate help, contact your local 24-hour crisis line.**

## What can you do?

- **Ask for help.** Talk to your partner, family, friends and health care provider. Delaying treatment may delay recovery.
- **Take care of yourself.** Try to rest, eat healthy foods and get some fresh air and exercise.
- **Take time for yourself.** Accept offers for help with household chores and baby care, so you can take a break.
- **Get counselling.** There are many support groups and health care professionals that can help you to talk through your feelings.
- **Consider medication.** Your health care provider may recommend medication. There are many medications that are safe to use while breastfeeding and antidepressants are not addictive.



## What can a partner, family & friends do?

- **Listen and support her feelings.** Encourage her to talk about her feelings. Don't tell her to, "Snap out of it," or "You should be happy to have a beautiful, healthy baby." Statements like these will only make her feel worse.
- **Support her decision to seek professional help.** Assist her in finding a compassionate health care professional. Offer to go with her to appointments for added support.
- **Develop your relationship with the baby.** This can provide the mother with a much needed break.
- **Ask her how you can help.** Providing meals, doing household chores or looking after other children will be helpful.
- **Educate yourself about postpartum mood disorders.** Be patient. It takes time to recover.
- **Take some time for yourself.** Ensure you have some time to do what you enjoy doing. You need a break too.
- **Make sure you have someone to talk to.** A postpartum mood disorder is hard on everyone. Family, friends, your health care provider or a 24-hour crisis line can provide you with needed assistance.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Our Sisters' Place  
[www.oursistersplace.ca](http://www.oursistersplace.ca)
- Pacific Postpartum Support Society  
[www.postpartum.org](http://www.postpartum.org)
- Postpartum Support International  
[www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net)
- Depression After Delivery  
[www.depressionafterdelivery.com](http://www.depressionafterdelivery.com) .

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