

## **Baby Blues and More**

### *Postpartum mood disorders*

*Some new mothers have “baby blues” or more serious postpartum mood disorders. This chapter gives ideas for things you can do to feel better, and for how partners, families, and friends can help. We list many local resources at the end of this chapter.*

For most women, having a baby is unlike any other event in their life. Both parents can feel excitement, joy, anxiety, confusion, love, and fear after the birth of their baby. If this is your first baby, your world will change as it never has before. Even if you have other children, the birth of each new baby brings many emotions and adjustments for the family.

In the months before your baby is born, most of the focus is on you, your changing body, and your baby growing inside of you. You and your partner may spend hours planning for your labor and birth. You may notice new mothers and fathers with their babies and dream of soon being a parent yourself.

### **Emotional Changes After Giving Birth**

But, most women and their partners do not know that for some new parents, the love and happy emotions may be overshadowed by feelings such as sadness, fear, anxiety, and overwhelm.

Healthcare providers may not say much about the emotions that can arise after giving birth. Most times, they do not want to scare the parents-to-be.

But, 50% to 80% of new parents (50 to 80 out of 100) have “baby blues,” and 20% of new mothers (20 out of 100) have a more serious postpartum mood disorder.



*For some new mothers, the joy of having a baby may be replaced by feelings of sadness, fear, anxiety, and overwhelm.*



*Baby blues are common. They affect about 50% to 80% of new mothers.*

Women who have had anxiety, depression, or other mood disorders in the past are at higher risk for having postpartum mood disorders.

It is very important to learn about these issues and find ways to talk about them. The best thing you can do for yourself is to speak up and share your concerns with someone you trust and who can get you help. This may be your partner, a close friend, your provider, nurse, or social worker. Holding in scary or negative thoughts and feelings may lead to a more serious situation.

This chapter explains baby blues and other postpartum mood problems that may need more attention. Your provider is the best person to listen to your symptoms. Your provider can determine what condition you may have and the best way to treat it.

**Postpartum mood disorders can be treated. With help, you will soon feel better.**

## **Baby Blues**

Baby blues affect about 50% to 80% of new mothers (50 to 80 out of 100). Symptoms can occur anytime from birth through the first 2 weeks after giving birth.

This common condition is not a postpartum adjustment disorder. Baby blues are mostly caused by the sudden change in the mother's hormones and feeling overwhelmed about being a new parent of a baby who is so dependent on her. Symptoms may include:

- Mood swings
- Crying
- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Fatigue
- Eating too much, too little, or having anxiety about food

Baby blues may last a few hours or as long as 2 weeks. With good physical care, strong emotional support, and knowing about this condition, these symptoms usually go away on their own.

**Even during the first 2 weeks, if you are overwhelmed by these symptoms, they interfere with your ability to care for your baby, or your symptoms are getting worse, something more serious may be going on. Call your provider if this happens to you.**



*Women with postpartum depression may have low energy and other symptoms of depression.*

## **Postpartum Depression**

Postpartum depression is a more serious condition. It can start anytime after delivery, but most often it occurs from 2 weeks up to 1 year after the baby's birth. This and some of the other disorders can affect 20% of new parents (20 out of 100), including fathers and parents who have adopted a baby.

If you are worried that you or someone you know may have a postpartum mood disorder, call your provider or a mental health specialist.

The most common thing women with postpartum depression say is that they "feel overwhelmed." Women with postpartum depression usually have many of the symptoms listed under baby blues. They may have low energy and depression symptoms, or they may be hyperactive and irritable. They may also say things like:

- I can't stop feeling depressed, no matter what I do.
- I cry at least once a day and sometimes I can't stop.
- I feel sad most or all of the time.
- I can't concentrate.
- I don't enjoy the things I used to enjoy.
- I have frightening thoughts about the baby or other family members.
- I can't sleep, even when my baby sleeps.
- I feel like a failure all of the time.
- I have no energy. I feel tired all of the time.
- I have no appetite and no enjoyment of food.
- I am having sugar and carbohydrate cravings and compulsively eating all the time.
- I can't remember the last time I laughed.
- Every little thing gets on my nerves lately. I am even furious with my baby. I am often angry with my partner.
- The future seems hopeless.
- It seems like I will feel this way forever.
- There are times when I feel I would be better off dead than to feel this way.



*Postpartum depression can start anytime up until about a year after your baby's birth.*

## **Postpartum Anxiety**

Postpartum anxiety can occur at the same time as postpartum depression. This is usually 2 weeks to 1 year after the birth of your baby. Symptoms of postpartum anxiety include:

- Unable to concentrate
- Afraid to go out
- Fear of being alone
- Feeling trapped
- Guilt
- Irritability
- Unable to sleep
- Constant fears for baby's health
- Anger or rage
- Rapid heartbeat
- Dizziness
- *Hyperventilating* (breathing very fast, not able to stop)
- Tingling or numbness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Muscle tension
- Diarrhea

## **Scary or Intrusive Thoughts**

A mother with a postpartum mood disorder may have scary thoughts. She may be flooded with thoughts about harm coming to her baby, such as, "What if I drop her out of the window" or "put her in the microwave." "Maybe there is something seriously wrong with my baby." "I am a terrible mother. My baby should have a different mother."

Sometimes these thoughts are constant. They may go along with a ritual such as:

- Constantly checking and re-checking the baby
- Checking to make sure no knives are missing or getting rid of all the knives in the house
- Doing safety checks on the house and locks



*Let your partner know how you are feeling.*

These behaviors are often disruptive to how a family functions. Most women will realize these thoughts and behaviors are due to their situation, and are not real. But a small number of women may believe their thoughts, or believe that someone outside of herself is telling her to do things. If this happens, it is much more serious. Call your provider **right away** if this happens.

The most important thing to remember is to share your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust, such as your partner, close friend, or provider, so they can get you the help you need. Call mental health services if you have any of these symptoms.

### **Things You Can Do to Feel Better**

Below is a list of things you can do to lessen the baby blues or symptoms of depression and anxiety. As the saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

You may not feel well enough to do many or any of these things. But, you do hold the power to get help and to help yourself.

- If you can, rest when your baby sleeps.
- Eat well.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol
- Make your needs a priority.
- Avoid strict or rigid schedules.
- Avoid overdoing.
- Do not expect too much from yourself right now.
- Tell yourself it’s OK to have negative feelings.
- Screen phone calls. Do not answer calls from people you don’t want to talk to. Set limits with visitors.
- Try not to compare yourself to others.
- Do not blame yourself.
- Avoid being with people who make you feel bad. Set boundaries with people you cannot avoid.
- Be careful about asking too many people for advice. Confide in someone you trust.
- Do the best you can. Even if it doesn’t feel like enough, it’s enough for now.

- Trust your instincts.
- Whether you have just 1 baby or are a mother of many children, every baby is different. Be patient with yourself. You will survive and succeed.

### **Make Time for You**

- Take a walk.
- Take a bath, once your provider says it's OK.
- Set small goals for yourself.
- Stay on all medicines your provider has prescribed.
- Get out of the house.
- Remind yourself that all adjustments take time.

### **Partner with Your Partner**

- Let your partner know how you are feeling.
- Thank your partner for helping you.
- Let your partner know what you want and need from them. They may not know.
- Encourage your partner to seek support from friends and outside activities.

### **Accept Help**

- Decide what needs to be done and what can wait.
- It is very hard for many of us to accept help. Know that you can:
  - Ask family members to do household tasks you usually do.
  - Make a list of daily and weekly tasks. Put the most important tasks at the top of the list. Let your friends and family choose their tasks – they may do more than one!
  - Get counseling, medicine, or both. Talk with your provider, nurse, or social worker about these options.

### **Helpful Tips for Partners, Families, and Friends**

Here are examples of helpful things to say to a mother who is struggling with a postpartum mood disorder. They can help her know you care and that you understand what she is going through. After the first list of things to say is a list of things NOT to say.



*There are many helpful resources for women and their partners who are dealing with postpartum mood disorders.*

### **DO tell her:**

- You know she feels terrible.
- She will get better.
- She is doing all the right things to get better (such as counseling or medicines).
- She can feel terrible and still be a good mother.
- It's OK to make mistakes. Things don't need to be done perfectly.
- You know how hard she's working at this right now.
- You will help with the baby and chores. Let her know she can ask for your help when she needs it.
- You know she's doing the best she can.
- You love her.
- Her baby will be fine.

### **Do NOT tell her:**

- She should get over this.
- You are tired of her feeling this way.
- This should be the happiest time of her life.
- You liked her better the way she was before.
- She'll snap out of this.
- She would feel better if only: she were working or not working, got out of the house more or stayed home more, etc.
- She should lose weight, color her hair, buy new clothes, etc.
- All new mothers feel this way.
- This is just a phase.
- Since she wanted a baby, this is what she has to go through.
- You know she's strong enough to get through this on her own and she doesn't need help.

## There Is a Lot of Help Out There

There are many helpful resources for women and their partners who are dealing with postpartum mood disorders. Here are just a few:

- **Perinatal Support Washington**  
888.404.7763, [perinatalsupport.org](http://perinatalsupport.org)  
Mother-to-mother support, support groups, therapists, doulas, and workshops.
- **24-Hour Crisis Clinic**  
866.427.4747  
Emotional support and referrals.
- **Northwest Association for Postpartum Support (NAPS)**  
206.956.1955, [www.napsdoulas.com](http://www.napsdoulas.com)
- **This Is Not What I Expected! Emotional Care for New Families Support Group**  
425.899.3602, [Evergreenhealth.com](http://Evergreenhealth.com)  
Free postpartum mood disorder support group for mothers, partners, and their families. Infants are welcome (mother's choice). Call for time and date.
- **Wellspring Family Services**  
208.826.3050, [Wellspringfs.org](http://Wellspringfs.org)  
1900 Rainier Ave. South, Seattle, WA 98144  
Parenting support, counseling
- **Counseling:** Many patients who have postpartum mood disorders find it helpful to talk with a counselor. Please talk with your healthcare provider, nurse, or social worker for a referral.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. If you have questions about postpartum mood disorders, talk with your healthcare provider.

The resources in this chapter may also be helpful.

**Now, please go back to the Table of Contents in this workbook and check the box so your nurses will know you have read this chapter.**