



Postpartum Depression

What Happens When the Baby Blues Don't Go Away

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What is Postpartum Depression?

Definition

A form of depression suffered by a mother following childbirth, typically arising from a combination of psychological adjustment to motherhood, hormonal changes, and fatigue.

Signs and Symptoms

A woman suffering from PPD might experience feelings of sadness, irritability, anger, lack of interest in the baby, guilt, changes in eating and sleeping habits, difficulty concentrating, hopelessness, and sometimes even thoughts of harming the baby or herself.

(Postpartum Support International, 2019 <https://www.postpartum.net/>)

Baby Blues vs. Postpartum Depression

Symptoms of the Baby Blues	Symptoms of Postpartum Depression
Sudden change in hormones	Sudden change in hormones
Stress	Stress
Isolation	Isolation
Sleep deprivation	Sleep deprivation
Irritability	Irritability
Affects up to 80% of mothers	Affects about 15% of women
Lasts up to two weeks	Can last for years if untreated
	Lack of interest in the baby
	Trouble bonding with the baby
	Hopelessness
	Thoughts of harming self and the baby
	Feeling of guilt, sadness, and anger

Scope and Severity

- PPD has been reported in as low as 8% to as high as 23% of women nationally.
- The highest risk time frame for the onset of PPD is within the first 3 months after childbirth.

(Andrews-Fike C. (1999). A Review of Postpartum Depression. *Primary care companion to the Journal of clinical psychiatry*, 1(1), 9–14. doi:10.4088/pcc.v01n0103)

- Without proper treatment, PPD may persist for years after childbirth.
- The severity of PPD may not only affect the mother's health, but can also interfere with her ability to connect with and care for her baby.
- Untreated PPD in mother may cause disruptions in baby's sleep, eating habits, and overall behavior.

(Postpartum Depression Facts. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/postpartum-depression-facts/index.shtml#pub9>.)

Myths

Debunking the Stigma of Postpartum Depression

- **“You just have the Baby Blues. You need to bounce back so you can be a good mom.”**

Up to 80% of women experience Baby Blues right after childbirth. The majority of new moms will recover just after a few days without any treatment. Symptoms of PPD are much more severe, and will persist without proper treatment, however, are in no way a reflection on a woman’s ability to be a good mother.

- **“If you’ve had thoughts about hurting your baby, you’re definitely going to do something terrible.”**

The media is responsible for terrifying mothers about stories of women “snapping” after childbirth, and doing unspeakable things to their children, and that is falsely labeled as Postpartum Depression. In all actuality, those women are suffering from a rare condition called Postpartum Psychosis, and affects less than 0.1% of new moms. Postpartum Psychosis is a condition where the mother loses touch with reality, and should always be treated as a medical emergency.

(5 myths about postpartum depression & anxiety, debunked. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://postpartum.org/services/for-moms/5-myths-about-postpartum-depression-anxiety-debunked/>.)

Myths

Debunking Continued

- **“I have had thoughts about hurting my baby, does that mean that I’m going to do something terrible?”**

Being afraid is a natural process of motherhood, especially those women who are first time moms. In fact, one of the more common symptoms of PPD is having intrusive thoughts about harming the baby whether it’s on purpose or accidental, and likely to result from the stressfulness and exhaustion of caring for a newborn. You WON’T hurt your baby!

- **“Postpartum Depression only targets the less fortunate women, and it’s completely their fault.”**

PPD does NOT discriminate! While there are certain factors that put some women at a higher risk for developing Postpartum Depression, the truth is that women from all walks of life can fall victim to it, and NO it is NOT their fault!

- **“Will I feel this way for the rest of my life?”**

The sun will shine again, mama bear! Some women recover sooner than others, but the great news is that with the proper support and skills, recovery IS possible.

(5 myths about postpartum depression & anxiety, debunked. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://postpartum.org/services/for-moms/5-myths-about-postpartum-depression-anxiety-debunked/>.)

How is PPD Diagnosed?

"I think I might have Postpartum Depression, but I'm not sure."

- An official diagnosis of Postpartum Depression can only be determined by a Healthcare Professional, however, below are some symptoms women should look out for and consider contacting their doctor about:
 - Feelings of Baby Blues persist for longer than two weeks.
 - Symptoms of depression begin one year after delivery, and last for more than two weeks.
 - Depressive symptoms become more intense and debilitating.
 - It is difficult to work, and get things done at home.
 - Finding it difficult to care for the baby and for yourself.
 - Having thoughts of hurting yourself and your baby.

Risks Factors

When this form of depression is present, it does not mean that the women affected are to blame. There are, however, some warning signs to be aware of, that may put women at a higher risk of developing Antepartum and Postpartum Depression. The table below reflects these factors.

History of Depression, Anxiety, Antepartum Depression, or Postpartum Depression.	Complications in pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.
Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD or PSM)	Mothers who infants are in Neonatal Intensive Care (NICU).
Inadequate support for mother and baby	Major recent life event.
Financial Stress	Mothers who have gone through infertility treatments.
Marital Stress	Women with a thyroid imbalance.
Mother of multiple babies (ie. Twins, triplets etc.)	Women with any form of Diabetes (Type 1, Type 2, or Gestational).

(Postpartum Support International, 2019 <https://www.postpartum.net/>)

How is Postpartum Depression Treated?

“Help is out there and you will be happy again!”

Psychotherapy

Most women avoid going to therapy for PPD in fear of being judged, feelings of shame and guilt for being told that they shouldn't feel the way that they feel. Being told that they're “faking it,” that they have “nothing to be upset about,” that they “should be happy.” The truth is that just because a woman is suffering from PPD, doesn't mean she isn't happy. There are a lot of underlying factors, and talking to a Mental Health Professional about the struggles of motherhood is the first step to healing.

Medication

Depending on the severity of PPD, some doctors may prescribe medication in conjunction with Psychotherapy. The type of medication is usually a form of antidepressant. In some cases, a medication called Brexanolone may be prescribed, however, needs to be administered by a doctor or nurse through an IV for two and a half hours. Esketamine is also another alternative medication that is administered as a nasal spray in a doctor's office or a clinic. It is important to always ask the doctor about side effects, especially if pregnant or breastfeeding.

(Postpartum depression. (2019, May 14). Retrieved from <https://www.womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/postpartum-depression.>)

Why is PPD Treatment Crucial?

“You are not alone. It’s okay to ask for help.”

Sometimes it feels as if no one understands, and feeling like a bad mother can make the symptoms feel so much worse. Considering the negative stigma behind Postpartum Depression, reaching out for help can seem impossible. Those feelings are valid, and so important to address. Untreated PPD can affect a woman’s ability to parent, along with:

- Constant, fluctuating mood swings.
- Lack of energy.
- Having a difficult time focusing on baby’s needs as well as mother’s needs.
- Not being able to care for the baby.
- Higher risk of attempting suicide.

Women suffering from PPD are worthy of getting the help they need and deserve in order to be able to experience the true joyfulness of motherhood, but getting to that place of asking can be so hard, especially with the amount of pressure being put on mother’s to “bounce back,” and “get over it,” and “be happy.” Mothers ARE human, and NEED just as much tender love and care as the bundles of joy they bring into this world.

(Postpartum depression. (2019, May 14). Retrieved from [https://www.womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/postpartum-depression.](https://www.womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/postpartum-depression))

Some Helpful Resources For Mama Bears

If you want to find out more about Postpartum Depression, and obtain some helpful resources:

- **Postpartum Support International 1 – 800 - 944 – 4PPD (1 – 800 – 944 – 4773)**

There is a lot of wonderfully educational literature to help guide you through your healing. Some of my favorites are listed below:

- **“You Can Heal Your Life” by Louise L. Hay (1984)**
- **“This Isn’t What I Expected: Overcoming Postpartum Depression” by Karen Kleiman and Valerie Davis Raskin MD (2013)**
- **“Happy Pants: Why Is Mummy So Sad” by Heather Gallagher (2014)**
- **Dropping The Baby, and Other Scary Thoughts: Breaking The Cycle of Unwanted Thoughts in Motherhood” by Karen Kleiman and Amy Wenzel (2010)**

“It Takes a Mama Bear”

A Postpartum Depression Support Group

“The female bear is a symbol of stealth and a powerful warrior. A mix of strength and tenderness. She is the bringer of balance, and nurturer of her environment. Her message is to seek and establish harmony and balance in all she does.”

- ❖ A huge part of self-care is surrounding yourself with nurturing, compassionate, and empowering people who not only empathize with you, but understand where you are and support your growth.

Join me and other Mama Bears from all walks of life in creating that safe space where we can awaken our inner motherly goddess, and create that balance of strength and tenderness.

- ❖ For more information about this group, please feel free to contact me. Let’s lift the stigma veil of PPD together!

Need More Guidance?

“How To Break The Postpartum Cycle”

You are not to blame. You are not alone. You will conquer this.

Being in such a vulnerable state, it doesn't take much to feel like your world is caving in, and help is intangible. **Close your eyes. Deep breaths. You can do this.**

Here's How:

- Seek support from caring family and friends (remember that friends are the family you choose).
- Accept that you are experiencing a postpartum syndrome so that you can process it through positive affirmations:
 - ~ “It is not my fault.”
 - ~ “I will not always feel this way.”
 - ~ “I will choose to participate in my treatment, and help myself improve.”

“It’s only a thought, and a thought can be changed.”

~ Louise L. Hay

Curb That Inner Critic

All of us would love to part with our inner critic, aka the inner bitch. She is brutal. Constantly hurling indictments, and wearing us out. That negative voice that triggers self-loathing, and seeks only to undermine our most authentic self. So how do you tell that inner bitch to take a back seat, and stop throwing you off your mommy groove?

Here’s How:

- Increase awareness of negative thinking, that can cause changes in mood, that can trigger negative responses, and escalate symptoms. Shining light on the inner critic weakens it.
- Instead of asking yourself “**what if**” tell yourself “**what is.**” How?
 - Invest in a journal, and start writing your thoughts down.
 - Challenge those thoughts. The Judge and Jury (inner critic) doesn’t like to be challenged. Ask yourself “Do I really believe this?” or is it something else? Are you just tired? Stressed? Hungry? Who’s voice is really playing in your head?

And, remember that you are worthy of your feelings.

“Wellness is the natural state of my body.”

~ Louise L. Hay

Define Your Nonnegotiable Needs

Yes you are a mother now, but you're still YOU. Give yourself permission to do some self-care. Remember that self-care can wear a lot of hats, and doesn't have to break the bank.

Here's How:

- Take a bath
- Do some relaxation techniques (ie. meditation, deep breathing)
- Exercise
- Listen to some music
- Read
- Take a nap! (Everyone will tell you "make sure to sleep when baby sleeps," but let's face it, does that actually happen? Rarely. Don't stress yourself out, you have enough of that. Sleep when you can because every little bit counts).

“Today I listen to my feelings, and I am gentle with myself.
I know that all of my feelings are my friends.”
~ Louise L. Hay

Deal With Those Difficult Feelings

It isn't easy to face the truth, and that's okay to admit to yourself. Some days are harder than others, but it's all about perspective. Think about it this way, the sooner you let go, the sooner you release yourself from those limiting beliefs and emotions that no longer serve you.

Here's How:

Repeat after me, “Today, I am letting go of.”

- Feelings of loss for the perfect pregnancy.
- Feelings of guilt
- Feeling of failure
- Feelings of loss for the perfect mother-baby experience
- Romanticizing childbirth and new motherhood
- Feelings of low self-esteem
- Feelings of fear.

References

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