

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Coping with Postpartum Depression

For many women, the birth of a baby can bring a wide range of emotions including sadness, anxiety and confusion. For women dealing with postpartum depression, these feelings can be nearly constant, overwhelming, and debilitating. Suffering from postpartum depression does not mean that you are crazy, or a bad mother. You are not alone and there is help and treatment.

A Continuum of Postpartum Experiences

Postpartum depression is different from the "baby blues" in depth and duration of experience.

The "baby blues" are more common, affecting up to 60 per cent of new mothers. Symptoms usually start three to four days after delivery and last several days, or sometimes as long as two weeks. Women experiencing the baby blues might have mood swings, trouble concentrating, loss of appetite, or feel irritable or unconfident. This condition is a minor disorder and is considered a normal part of early motherhood.

Postpartum depression (PPD) affects approximately 10 per cent to 20 per cent of new mothers. Its onset can begin days, weeks or even months after delivery. Serious depression that occurs in the months after childbirth may be PPD and should be assessed by a physician or qualified mental health practitioner.

Some new mothers—roughly one in every thousand—experience what is called **postpartum psychosis**. This is a rare disorder that normally occurs within the first two weeks of childbirth and is marked by insomnia, hallucinations, hyperactivity/mania, rapid speech, paranoia, extreme confusion, agitation and depression. Postpartum psychosis is a serious condition that requires immediate medical attention.

Treatment for Postpartum Depression

Treatment for PPD can take a number of forms. A typical treatment plan may include:

- **Creating a supportive environment for the new mother.** Enlisting the support of family, friends, relatives and homecare.
- **Self-Care.** Proper nutrition and exercise.
- **Counselling.** Support from a qualified mental health practitioner.
- **Support groups.** Self-help and community groups that provide education and emotional support for women experiencing PPD.
- **Medication.** The use of anti-depressants may help alleviate symptoms.

Tips for Coping with Postpartum Depression

- REST! Plan times when you can rest and if possible nap when your baby naps. Get help from family and friends who can look after the baby while you get some sleep.

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- Talk to your doctor about how you are feeling. He or she may offer emotional support or medications that can help. Be sure to check with your doctor before starting any medicines (herbal or artificial), especially if you are breastfeeding.
- Find some time to do something for yourself everyday, such as going for a walk, taking a bath or reading.
- Maintain open, honest communication with your partner and try to arrange shared responsibilities so you do not become overburdened.
- Ask for help. Be honest about what you can handle and let others know what you need.
- Eat well. Do not skip meals. Eat nutritious, balanced meals and try to avoid high sugar and high fat junk food.
- Avoid all alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Keep a journal or diary as a way of expressing how you feel.
- Take one day at a time. Focus on the goals for the day. Even if you can only get one thing done, this is a step in the right direction. Try to be patient, gentle and forgiving with yourself.
- Find a PPD support group in your area. You will feel less alone being around others who understand and share what you are experiencing.
- Build a support network of family, friends and perhaps even a counselor with whom you can talk about your feelings, fears and concerns.

Though your symptoms of PPD may be unique, you are not alone. With time, care of a health care specialist, and support of family and friends, it will get easier.