

Postpartum Depression

The birth of a baby often brings feelings of joy. Parents may also feel anxious, worried, and sad. It is also normal to feel overwhelmed. There are changes and stresses that come with being a parent. It is helpful to learn about ways to cope with these feelings. Learning to cope improves the lifelong health of the parent and helps you relate better with the baby. Feelings after giving birth run from the blues to severe depression. The milder forms are the most common.

Depressive Symptoms in the Postpartum Period

Postpartum Blues

Up to 80% of people may experience postpartum (after delivery) blues. Most times, this begins 4-5 days after delivery. Symptoms may include feeling weepy, joyful, scared, excited, anxious, irritable and/or lonely. People can have changes in eating, concentration, and sleeping. The symptoms lessen over a two-week time frame. If symptoms persist over two weeks, contact your healthcare team.

Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression affects 1 in 5 birthing people and 1 in 10 support people. Symptoms often start 1-4 months after birth. A small number of people notice symptoms 5-12 months after birth.

Anyone can have depression after giving birth. There are many risk factors, such as previous mental health history, but many times it is unpredictable.

Symptoms of postpartum depression may include:

- Feeling sad, teary, or down most of the day.
- Loss of pleasure in previously enjoyable activities.
- Trouble sleeping, even when baby is asleep.
- Trouble eating, needing to be reminded to eat, or marked overeating.
- Restlessness or feeling slowed down.
- Lack of energy.
- Low self-worth or feelings of guilt.
- Unexplained anger
- Trouble focusing or making small decisions.
- Thoughts of hurting yourself or your baby (this is different than worry that you will accidentally harm your baby).

Anxiety symptoms may also go along with postpartum depression. These may include:

- Excessive anxiety or worry
- Irritability
- Panic attacks or fears that prevent you from doing normal daily activities such as taking the baby in the car.

If you have any of these symptoms, please contact your healthcare team.

Coping and Treatment for Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression can be treated with medicine and/or therapy. Self-help strategies include:

- Go outside (with and without the baby) when the weather permits.
- Talk with adults every day, reach out to family and friends.
- Find an exercise or daily movement that you enjoy.
- Take time out for you every day.
- Ask for help from your support network. Take turns getting up at night to care for the baby.
- Talk over your concerns with your support network. Ask for respite and support.
- Eat healthy food.
- Join a support group for new parents.

Postpartum depression often gets better within 6 months. If it is not treated, it can last up to 2 years or become long-term depression.

If self-help does not help your mood, it may be a sign that you need professional help. There are many people who can help. Your nurse, midwife, doctor, therapists, psychiatrists, and clergy can help you. Asking for help is the best thing you can do for you and your baby.

Postpartum Psychosis

This is rare, occurring in about 1 in 1000 people usually within the first two weeks after giving birth. Symptoms include

- Severe agitation.
- Major lack of sleep for more than one night.
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that others do not).
- Bizarre thoughts or actions.
- Thoughts of harming yourself, your baby or others.

This is a medical emergency. People with these symptoms should be seen right away at the Emergency Room or by a psychiatrist.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 6/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing and Department of Psychiatry. HF#5112