

# Postpartum Depression

## What is postpartum depression?

It is a serious form of depression that comes after giving birth. As many as four out of five women have mood changes in the first 10 days after giving birth. This is often called “baby blues.” If the symptoms are more severe and last for more than 10 days, it is called postpartum depression.

Some women feel better within a few weeks. Others may feel depressed for several months. Women who have more serious symptoms or who have had depression before may take longer to feel better.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include sadness, anxiety, and crying. Some women may worry too much about their baby, or be afraid of making mistakes in caring for their baby. They also may find it hard to concentrate or fall asleep. Some women may lose interest in things they used to enjoy.

It is normal to worry a bit after having a baby. However, worrying too much can keep you from taking care of yourself and your family.

Some women with postpartum depression have pictures or thoughts pop into their mind about hurting their baby. These thoughts can be very upsetting, and do not mean that these women really want to hurt their baby. This is a common symptom of postpartum depression and will go away with treatment. Talk to your doctor if this happens to you.

Women with severe postpartum depression may think that life is not worth living, or that

their baby or family would be better off without them. Call your doctor right away if you are having these thoughts.

## What causes it?

The causes are unclear. Some women are very sensitive to the hormone changes in their body after childbirth, which may cause depression. Feeling this way does not mean that you are a bad person.

## Who gets it?

Any woman can get it, but certain factors make it more likely. These include:

- Previous depression, especially during pregnancy or after childbirth
- Difficult or stressful personal relationships
- Few family members or friends to talk to
- Other stressful life events during pregnancy or after childbirth

## How is it treated?

Your doctor may prescribe an antidepressant medicine. He or she may also recommend individual or group therapy.

## Can I take medicine for postpartum depression if I am breastfeeding?

Yes. The amount of medicine that enters the breast milk is very small and not likely to harm your baby. Not treating your depression is more likely to harm your baby. Untreated depression can lead to poor mother-baby bonding, delays in growth and development, and an increased risk of depression for your child later in life.



# Postpartum Depression *(continued)*

## What else can I do to feel better?

It is important to remember that many other women have these feelings. Talk with your doctor about making an action plan with specific ideas for things you can do to help you feel better.

## Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

Web sites: <http://familydoctor.org/379.xml>  
and <http://familydoctor.org/871.xml>

American College of Obstetricians and  
Gynecologists

Web site: [http://www.acog.org/publications/patient\\_education/bp091.cfm](http://www.acog.org/publications/patient_education/bp091.cfm)

MedEd: Postpartum depression resource

Web site: <http://mededppd.org/mothers/>

Medline Plus: Postpartum depression

Web site: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/postpartumdepression.html>

Postpartum Support International

Web site: <http://www.postpartum.net>

U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services: Office on Women's Health

Web site: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/depression-pregnancy.cfm>

## Notes:

October 2010

---

**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Copyright © 2010 American Academy of Family Physicians. Individuals may photocopy this material for their own personal reference, and physicians may photocopy for use with their own patients. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.