



MedStar Franklin Square
Medical Center



Postpartum Depression

Knowledge and Compassion
Focused on You

While the birth of a baby is a joyful and anticipated event, the sudden and often unexpected realities following birth may leave the new mother with a variety of feelings, including anxiety, guilt, anger and incompetence.

These feelings are usually temporary, but in some cases may result in mood changes that cause concern for the woman and her family.

What is postpartum blues?

Research has found that about 50 to 75 percent of new mothers experience mild mood changes, or baby blues, following the birth of a baby. These symptoms usually appear during the first week postpartum and continue for two to three weeks. Mothers experiencing the blues may feel general despondency, forgetfulness, sadness, hopelessness or elation, have trouble concentrating, and be easily reduced to tears.



What is postpartum depression?

Although less common, postpartum depression is of more concern, affecting about one out of 10 new mothers, and lasting for as long as a year after birth. Symptoms may be similar to those common to the blues, but other, more disturbing symptoms may result in the interruption in performance of daily activities. **Please be sure to seek medical attention immediately for the following postpartum depression symptoms:**

- Sleep deprivation
- Appetite disturbances (abnormal weight loss or gain)
- Feelings of hopelessness, confusion, inadequacy or guilt
- Loss of self-esteem and identity
- Loss of energy and/or sex drive
- Avoidance of social contacts
- Obsessions, phobias, fantasies or panic attacks
- Thoughts of harm to self and/or baby
- Irrational fears regarding the baby

What causes postpartum depression?

While it is difficult to establish a cause or causes of postpartum mood changes, several theories have been proposed. Some suggested causes are physiological in nature, including fatigue, endocrine changes, sudden hormone imbalance and blood loss related to birth. Other contributing factors may be social or cultural; changes in body image and social life, disturbances in career or difficulty adjusting to the role of mother. Postpartum mood changes are more likely to result from a combination of these contributing factors.

How do I avoid postpartum depression?

Begin now to develop a prenatal/postpartum plan of prevention.

1. Develop a realistic approach to the mothering role.

- Decide what characteristics of mothering are most important to you. Is your valuable time better spent baking cookies or being available to your child?
- Observe mothers with their infants in grocery stores and shopping malls.



2. Your first days at home.

- Limit visitors! You need to focus on rest and establishing a routine with your baby.
- Consider your first days at home as an extension of your hospital visit. Stay in your robe and nightgown to discourage your own tendency to overwork.
- Ask a female relative or a friend to help in the home for a few days. You need to be mothered, too!
- If possible, hire a housekeeper for a few days to lighten your load and relieve you of household responsibilities.

3. Don't forget the woman you are!

- Sleep and rest are vital to your sense of well-being, as well as your energy to care for others. Sleep when the baby sleeps. Try a warm bath or a good book as sleep-inducers. What about those relaxation techniques you learned in childbirth classes?
- Eat well! Maintain a normal energy level by eating small, frequent amounts and avoiding excess caffeine and alcohol. Consider additional fluid and caloric needs if breastfeeding.
- Exercise! Once your healthcare provider clears you, vigorous exercise helps to release endorphins, the mood-enhancing chemicals in your body. In addition, you'll have more energy, experience less stress and feel better about your body, with the added benefit of regaining your figure. No time to get out to exercise? Rent or purchase a variety of workout DVDs.

4. Time out from motherhood.

- What about the hobbies and activities that are so much a part of who you are? Get involved again.
- Take turns with your partner and give each other the gift of a guilt-free night out on a regular basis.

5. Avoid isolation.

- Keep in touch with friends, at least by phone or correspondence.
- Organize or attend mother-toddler or mother support groups that meet regularly.

6. Keep your partnership alive.

- Arrange to go out on a date with your partner within four to six weeks after birth and regularly thereafter. Agree to discuss topics other than the baby for at least part of the evening.
- Find a few minutes in every day to share and listen to each other.
- Recognize that you may need to revise your career goals so they are less demanding when your child is young and in need of your attention.
- Hire part- or full-time help to ease your responsibilities, if possible. Enlist your partner's support in sharing the workload, starting now.
- Recognize that you may not always be available when your child wants or needs you. Try to develop some approaches that you can use when this happens.



Remember ...

While the birth of your new baby may bring great joy and reward to you and your family, it may also be the most dramatic life change you will ever experience. You can expect a change in lifestyle, social contacts, career, and physical and mental demands. The birth of your baby may also be perceived as a loss, resulting in a grieving response. Your baby is no longer yours alone and the special attention you enjoyed during pregnancy may now be lavished upon your baby instead. In addition, your independence and social freedoms are restricted, leaving you with feelings of sadness, anger, frustration and loneliness. Recognizing these feelings as normal is the first step in regaining control of your life.

Being kind to yourself will help you to be the kind and loving mother you know you can be. Should your symptoms become more extreme, prolonged or immobilizing, don't wait; seek immediate help.

The following are available and eager to support you.

Your obstetrician or nurse-midwife:

Counseling Center at MedStar Franklin Square Medical Center	443-777-7785
Breastfeeding and New Mothers Support Group	443-777-7427
Essex Breastfeeding Luncheon	410-828-7700 (ext. 1265 to register)
Postpartum Support International National Hotline and Information Service	800-944-4773 PostPartum.net

This material was prepared for general informational and educational purposes. Please contact your physician for medical advice.

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MedStar Franklin Square
Medical Center

Population and Community Health
9000 Franklin Square Dr.
Baltimore, MD 21237
443-777-7482 **PHONE**