

# Post-Partum Depression



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Many women experience a temporary mood disturbance after childbirth. But an estimated 9-16 percent of American women will experience post-partum depression, a disorder that occurs after pregnancy. Symptoms may include extreme difficulty in day-to-day functioning due to cognitive impairment and feelings of guilt, anxiety and fear. Women with post-partum depression may experience a loss of pleasure in life, insomnia, bouts of crying and thoughts of hurting themselves or the child. Post-partum depression affects the whole family. Partners of women with post-partum depression may become depressed, especially if the relationship is in trouble or he or she is having trouble adjusting to the demands of having a child.

During pregnancy, a woman's estrogen and progesterone levels increase. In the first 24 hours after childbirth, these hormone levels abruptly return to normal. This change may contribute to post-partum depression. Studies suggest that women who experience post-partum depression often have had previous episodes of depression that may not have been diagnosed and treated. But any woman, even those without previous episodes of depression, can experience the illness; it says nothing about a woman's capacity to be a good mother. With treatment (talk therapy and/or medication), she can feel better.

Children of mothers with post-partum depression may be at increased risk for language development delays, mother-child bonding problems, behavior problems and increased crying. One of the criteria used to diagnose depression is appetite change. However, appetite may not be suitable for the diagnosis of depression in the perinatal (the period around birth, *i.e.* five months before and one month after) period.

Previous depressive episodes and conflicts with a husband or partner are risk factors for major post-partum depression. Family history of depression, social support, anxiety, marriage or money problems, stress and substance abuse may also play roles. The risk of developing minor depression is associated with being a stay-at-home mother, previous depressive episodes and unwanted pregnancy.

Women who have one episode of post-partum depression have a 50 percent chance of experiencing it with a second pregnancy. Thyroid hormones may also decrease after childbirth, possibly causing symptoms similar to depression. A simple blood test can determine if thyroid levels are to blame and a doctor can then prescribe thyroid medicine.

Research shows that certain antidepressants, including some SSRIs, can be used during breastfeeding. Women who suffer from post-partum depression should discuss the best course of treatment with their health care provider.

Post-partum psychosis is a rare illness that also occurs after childbirth. It is characterized by seeing things that don't exist, confusion, rapid mood swings and thoughts of harming oneself or the infant. It only occurs in about one to four of every 1,000 births. Women who have bipolar disorder or schizoaffective disorder are at increased risk.

See more at: <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Post-PartumDepression>  
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