

## Recognizing Postpartum Depression

### What is Postpartum Depression?

Postpartum depression (PPD) can be disabling for a new mother. PPD is a type of major depression that affects about one in 10 new mothers within the first year after childbirth. Postpartum depression has the potential to negatively impact a new mother's health and her ability to care for and nurture her infant.

New mothers most commonly experience what is known as 'the baby blues.' Up to 70 to 80 percent of new mothers experience this. Baby blues are normal reactions following childbirth triggered by hormonal changes and stress that having a baby brings. Characterized by mood swings, mild sadness, irritability and some worry, the baby blues usually occur around 3 – 5 days after delivery and tend to subside as hormone levels begin to stabilize. The baby blues differ from PPD in that the symptoms tend not be severe, do not need treatment and generally do not last beyond two weeks.

A woman with PPD experiences the symptoms much more strongly and can be impaired to the point where she is unable to do the things she needs to do every day. PPD can begin at any time within the first year after giving birth and lasts longer than the blues. While PPD is a serious condition, it can be treated successfully with medication and counseling.



### Symptoms of Postpartum Depression

The following symptoms of PPD may mean that a mother is experiencing something more serious than the baby blues. Multiple symptoms that do not go away or thoughts of suicide may mean the mother could need an evaluation by a physician or mental health professional.

#### Emotions

- Increased crying and irritability
- Hopelessness and sadness
- Uncontrollable mood swings
- Feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope
- Fear of harming the baby, her partner or herself
- Fear of being alone

#### Behaviors

- Not having any interest in the baby or overly concerned for it
- Poor self-care
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Decreased energy and motivation
- Withdrawal or isolation from friends and family
- Inability to think clearly or make decisions

#### Physical Symptoms

- Exhaustion, sluggishness and fatigue
- Sleep and appetite disturbances not related to care of the baby
- Headaches, chest pains, hyperventilation, heart palpitations

## Risk Factors

Certain factors may increase a new mother's risk of depression during and after pregnancy. Detection of risk factors early is critical to preventing postpartum depression. The following represents possible risk factors.

- A personal history of depression or another mental illness or substance abuse
- A family history of depression or another mental illness
- A lack of support from family and friends
- Anxiety or negative feelings about the pregnancy
- Previous pregnancy, birth or postpartum difficulties
- Marriage or money problems
- Stressful life events
- Young and/or single mother
- Complications during labor/birth
- Low confidence as a parent
- Problems with baby's health
- A major life change at same time as birth of baby

## In Oklahoma

- One in four Oklahoma mothers suffer from key symptoms of postpartum depression between two and six months postpartum
- Approximately 40 percent of all Oklahoma mothers reported that their healthcare provider did not discuss postpartum depression in their prenatal care
- Women ages 20 – 24 were twice as likely to indicate symptoms of depression when compared to women ages 35 or older; adolescents (under 20) were 2.5 times as likely
- Stressors found to increase the risk of depression symptoms were having an unintended pregnancy, arguing with a partner more than usual during pregnancy and having bills one could not pay

### Sources:

US Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health:  
<http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/depression-pregnancy.pdf>

Oklahoma Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, v. 12 no. 2 Spring 2008

For more information contact your local mental health agency or

### **Mental Health Association**

Toll Free 1-800-969-NMHA(6642)

TTY 1-800-433-5959 <http://www.nmha.org>

Postpartum Support International (PSI)

National hotline 1-800-944-4PPD [www.Postpartum.net](http://www.Postpartum.net)



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