

Childbirth Preparation: Labor, Birth and Postpartum healing

Postpartum Healing

“BABY BLUES” vs. POSTPARTUM MOOD DISORDERS

In the first few weeks after having a baby, it is extremely common for new moms to experience what is known as the “baby blues.” These bouts of tearfulness, moodiness, grief or sadness are actually quite normal and stabilize within 10-14 days. Postpartum Mood Disorders are much more severe, long term occurring, and require professional support as soon as possible. Below are some ways of helping to discern between “baby blues” and postpartum mood disorders. If in doubt, always call your provider (or a mental health professional) to sort out if what you are experiencing is within the realm of healthy adjustment, or if formal support is recommended.

	“Baby Blues”	Postpartum Mood Disorders
Onset	1 st 10 days Postpartum	Usually begins 2-6 weeks PP
How Common	90% women experience	13-20% women experience
Causes	Probably product hormonal fluctuations, stress of new baby, & mental/emotional intensity of birth.	Probably related to long term impact of estrogen/progesterone drop, exhaustion, nutritional deficits, hereditary, mental health history, level of sensitivity to dramatic drop in estrogen, and birth trauma
Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tearfulness Feeling Tired Feelings of Loss Feelings of Insecurity Mild Anxiety Over emotional Up and Down Mood Shifts Low Spirited Muddled Thinking 	Extreme or Prolonged Experience of Emotional Distress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to Concentrate or Sleep Restlessness or Agitation Extreme Anxiety, Worry or Panic Fits of Crying, Anger or Rage Overwhelming Sense of Helplessness, Hopelessness or Guilt Sudden Change in Appetite Shortness of Breath or Chest Pains Feelings of Choking or Smothering Fear of Death Loss of Control Disturbing or Violent Thoughts and Images Hallucinations, Bizarre Thoughts, Behaviors, or Paranoia Thoughts or Urges to Harm Yourself Thoughts or Urges to Harm Your Baby
Care for Baby	Can still care for self & baby	Often unable to care for self and/or baby.

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Postpartum Mood Disorders- a Hidden Struggle

Every year in the United States, roughly 11-20% of women with clinically recognized pregnancies will experience the symptoms of a postpartum mood disorder, such as postpartum depression, postpartum anxiety, or postpartum psychosis. According to the CDC, this means that nearly 900,000 women in the US this year alone, will meet the diagnostic criteria, with varying degrees of symptoms. This number is higher than the number of persons (men and women) this year that will be initially diagnosed with tuberculosis, leukemia, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, lupus, and epilepsy all together. However, unfortunately, only 15% of those who meet this clinical criteria will receive professional treatment for their symptoms.

So why are so few women actually receiving help for such a common condition? Many clinicians will identify the reasons as stemming from the stigma behind recognizing, acknowledging and treating postpartum mood disorders. PMD. Screening for PMD is often overlooked and women sometimes are unable to see that their symptoms are not a "normal" part of their experience. Some women find themselves hiding, which gives us the freedom, or rather the illusion of freedom, from the fear of being misunderstood. We all want to be "good moms" and expectations, often unrealistic ones, can lead to further isolation, fear and sadness. All of this on top of hormonal changes and medical issues can complicate psychological situations further.

Recognizing postpartum mood disorders, although complex, can also be as simple as feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, excessively worrying, tearful, etc. Or it can be as extreme as not wanting to attach to your child, having thoughts of harming yourself or others and feeling so hopeless, you detach from reality. The good news is that there is hope. There are many clinicians, across numerous disciplines that are seeing the need to reduce stigma and help families feel supported.

United, we as a culture, can break the misunderstanding and the fear of postpartum mood disorders and help women see that there is hope and care when needed. This will in turn enhance attachment, better families and improve overall prognosis for the individual and families affected.

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MENTAL HEALTH SELF-CARE FOR NEW MOMS

Birth is physically, mentally and emotionally taxing and you need time to heal and process the experience:

- Nurture yourself physically with good nutrition, regular physical activity, and sleep (need a minimum of 5 uninterrupted hours of sleep each 24 hour period)
- Develop a support system with other moms, or with family or friends who will listen
- Keep your expectations of yourself and motherhood realistic. Give up the need to be supermom.
- Take breaks to rest mentally, emotionally, and physically.
- Continue to practice your deep breathing and physical relaxation exercises
- Express and acknowledge negative feelings about postpartum changes and the losses you have experienced while also attending to positive ones.
- Structure your day to regain a sense of control.
- Nurture your sense of humor.
- Postpone major life changes; now is not the time to move, change jobs, etc.

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Reaching Out for Postpartum Support

- Call 911 if you feel the urge to harm yourself or your baby.
- Providence Urgent Mental Health
406-327-3034
Call anytime (moms and/or dad) and receive an appointment time to speak privately with a counselor. Counselors can offer one-on-one counseling, as well as couples counseling.
- Out of the Blue: A Postpartum Group for Moms

One in five women experience some form of postpartum emotional challenges. This does not occur because of something a mother does or does not do. If you are experiencing, or have experienced sadness, emptiness, irritability, feeling overwhelmed, excessive worry, withdrawal from family and friends, loss of interest, or disconnection with your baby, there are options for help. “Out of the Blue” is a Postpartum Group for moms designed to support you through this transition. This group meets every week, and moms are welcome and encouraged to attend with their babies.

Where there is Help, there is Hope. For more information about the Providence St. Patrick Hospital “Out of the Blue” Group, please call:

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