

Depression After Childbirth: Care Instructions



Your Care Instructions

Many women get the "baby blues" during the first few days after childbirth. You may lose sleep, feel irritable, and cry easily. You may feel happy one minute and sad the next. Hormone changes are one cause of these emotional changes. Also, the demands of a new baby, along with visits from relatives or other family needs, add to a mother's stress. The "baby blues" often peak around the fourth day. Then they ease up in less than 2 weeks.

If your moodiness or anxiety lasts for more than 2 weeks, or if you feel like life is not worth living, you may have postpartum depression. This is different for each mother. Some mothers with serious depression may worry intensely about their infant's well-being. Others may feel distant from their child. Some mothers might even feel that they might harm their baby. A mother may have signs of paranoia, wondering if someone is watching her.

Depression is not a sign of weakness. It is a medical condition that requires treatment. Medicine and counseling often work well to reduce depression. Talk to your doctor about taking antidepressant medicine while breastfeeding.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How do you know if you are depressed?

With all the changes in your life, you may not know if you are depressed. Pregnancy sometimes causes changes in how you feel that are similar to the symptoms of depression.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad or hopeless and losing interest in daily activities. These are the most common symptoms of depression.
- Sleeping too much or not enough.
- Feeling tired. You may feel as if you have no energy.
- Eating too much or too little.
- Writing or talking about death, such as writing suicide notes or talking about guns, knives, or pills. Keep the numbers for these national suicide hotlines: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) and 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433). If you or someone you know talks about suicide or feeling hopeless, get help right away.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Be safe with medicines. Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Eat a healthy diet so that you can keep up your energy.
- Get regular daily exercise, such as walks, to help improve your mood.
- Get as much sunlight as possible. Keep your shades and curtains open. Get outside as much as you can.
- Avoid using alcohol or other substances to feel better.
- Get as much rest and sleep as possible. Avoid doing too much. Being too tired can increase depression.
- Play stimulating music throughout your day and soothing music at night.
- Schedule outings and visits with friends and family. Ask them to call you regularly, so that you do not feel alone.
- Ask for help with preparing food and other daily tasks. Family and friends are often happy to help a mother with a newborn.
- Be honest with yourself and those who care about you. Tell them about your struggle.
- Join a support group of new mothers. No one can better understand the challenges of caring for a newborn than other new mothers.

- If you feel like life is not worth living or are feeling hopeless, get help right away. Keep the numbers for these national suicide hotlines: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) and 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433).

When should you call for help?

Call anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You feel you cannot stop from hurting yourself, your baby, or someone else.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You are having trouble caring for yourself or your baby.
- You hear voices.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You have problems with your depression medicine.
- You do not get better as expected.

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