



Mood Changes During Pregnancy and After Childbirth

Pregnancy can be filled with emotional highs and lows. Having a new baby is challenging. Caring for yourself as well as your new baby is a lot of work. You will be going through many physical and emotional changes. You may find that some of these changes are not what you expected. Many times, along with joy and excitement, you may also be worried and sad.

It is important to be patient with yourself. Surround yourself with as much support as you can during this time. Even with patience and support, you may still feel overwhelmed and concerned. You may be telling yourself, “I didn’t expect to feel this way...”

Why do I feel this way?

There is no clear or single reason why a new mom’s moods change. What you are feeling may be the “baby blues”. Or it may be something more serious. Perinatal mood disorders can happen before or after you deliver your baby.

Is this normal?

It is very common to feel worry or sadness before or after you give birth. If you do feel like something is wrong, then trust your instincts and tell your provider. This does not mean that anything awful is happening. It may just be a sign that you are tired or overwhelmed and need some time and rest. Other times, you may need help to feel like you again.

Pregnant or postpartum moms can have different responses. Some are more common than others. **They can occur at any time up to two years following childbirth.**

Prenatal anxiety or depression

Some moms-to-be will have feelings of worry, sadness, fear, or confusion. Many times a mom-to-be will not tell others that she feels this way. She may even deny these feelings. It is VERY important to tell your provider if you are feeling any of these symptoms, so he or she can help you before you give birth. About 12 out every 100 moms-to-be will have these feelings.

“Baby Blues”

Most new moms will experience the “baby blues” very soon after giving birth. This is **NOT** an illness, and will resolve on its own. The blues are brought on due to lack of sleep, breast engorgement and a major shift in hormones after childbirth. Moms may feel short-term sadness, guilt, restlessness or impatience. Sometimes moms may notice themselves crying for no reason or feeling anxious. This is short-term and will stop within a week or two. The baby blues affect about 80% of new moms.



Postpartum anxiety or depression

About 1 in 10 women will experience anxiety and about 1 in 7 will experience depression after childbirth. Symptoms can include:

- extreme worry
- sadness
- irritability
- trouble sleeping
- loss of interest in activities
- hopelessness
- changes in appetite
- loss of focus
- feelings of extreme guilt or shame
- not being able to care for yourself or your baby



Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

About 3-5% of new moms experience OCD after childbirth. Symptoms include:

- counting
- checking
- repeated behaviors (such as cleaning or hand washing)
- repeated thoughts or obsessions (also referred to as intrusive thoughts)
- mental pictures of horrible scenes involving your baby or yourself
- fear of germs or taking extra measures to protect your baby

Bipolar Mood Disorders

Symptoms include mood swings that range from very high happy times to drastic lows or depression. If someone in the mother's family has bipolar mood disorder, the mother's risk for bipolar mood disorder is higher. Symptoms include:

- racing thoughts
- inability to sleep
- anxiety
- overconfidence
- impulsiveness

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

About 9% of moms experience PTSD from childbirth. This can be due to a traumatic or perceived traumatic childbirth. Childbirth can also cause a mom to remember previous abuse or assault.

Psychosis

About 1 or 2 new moms out of 1,000 will experience this serious and rare illness. Symptoms usually come on very quickly and include very happy feelings, confusion, paranoia or seeing and hearing things that others do not.

What are the risk factors for developing a postpartum mood disorder?

Mood disorders can strike any new mom. Sometimes we can identify risk factors ahead of time. Risk factors include:

- Having a high risk or stressful pregnancy
- Hormonal changes
- History of infertility
- Family mental health history
- History of anxiety or depression.
- Previous postpartum mood disorder
- History of any type of abuse or trauma
- Lack of sleep or social support
- Major life changes (such as a new job, moving, financial strain)



What does having a postpartum mood disorder feel like?

- “It feels like an emergency only you know is happening. Like everything is on fire.”
- “It feels scary.”
- “Everything feels hopeless.”
- “I feel like no one understands.”
- “I can’t sleep even when my baby is sleeping.”
- “I can’t concentrate.”
- “I don’t remember the last time I laughed or felt joy.”
- “I have no energy to care for myself or my baby.”
- “My head and thoughts feel like they are spinning out of control.”
- “Everything seems to get on my nerves. I find myself getting angry at everything.”
- “I worry and have intrusive thoughts about purposely or accidentally harming my baby.”
- “Sometimes I feel like my baby would be better off without me.”
- “There are times when I feel like I would rather be dead than go on feeling like this for one more second.”

Will I ever be okay again?

YES. You are not alone. There is help.

- Don't blame yourself. You are a good mother and feeling this way is not a choice.
- Ask for help. Talk to your provider and let them know what you are feeling.
- Ask to be connected to a therapist trained in perinatal mood changes.
- A support system is very important. Talk to someone you trust like your partner, friends or family about your feelings.
- Join a support group for new mothers.
- Eat healthy and try and stay away from caffeine, alcohol, or sugary foods.
- Exercise and stay active to help keep up your energy.
- Allow yourself some personal time to read a book, watch a favorite television show or hang out with a friend. Do something that takes your mind off things.
- Avoid people or situations that make you feel anxious or stressed out.
- Have confidence in yourself and take one day at a time. And when that feels like too much, take one hour at a time, or one minute at a time.
- Remember that the healing takes time.

Sometimes moms need to take medicine. Medicine can be a valuable tool in helping moms get well. There are many medicines that are safe and can be taken while you are breastfeeding. Your provider will help assess what the right choice is for you.

How can others help?

- Listen to her worries and concerns. Take them seriously.
- Assure her that she is not being judged.
- Remind her she is not to blame. Tell her that with help, she will feel better.
- Go with her to appointments if you are able.
- Take charge of household chores like laundry, cooking and cleaning.
- Remind her to rest and eat good nutritious foods.
- Remind her that she is important, cared for, and loved.



Don't be afraid to call for help if you know mom needs it and is too scared or won't call herself. As her partner or loved one, you may need to take charge. You could be saving her life.

Can partners or adoptive parents experience perinatal mood changes too?

YES. Perinatal mood disorders like depression or anxiety are not just hormonally driven. One in ten partners can also have symptoms due to their role changes, stress of finances or simply caring for the baby. Adoptive parents can have symptoms too. More research still needs to be done in this area.

Mood disorders in adoptive parents have been linked to:

- Fatigue
- Expectations
- Lack of social support
- Issues with bonding



“You are not alone. You are not to blame. With help, you will be well.”

-Postpartum Support International

Do I need help?

Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)^{1, 2}

Take this test during pregnancy or within the first two years of baby being born to find out if you need more help. Circle the answer that comes closest to how you have felt in **the past 7 days**, not just how you are feeling today.

1. I have been able to laugh and see the funny side of things.

- 0= As much as I always could
- 1=Not quite so much now
- 2=Definitely not so much now
- 3=Not at all

2. I have looked forward with enjoyment to things.

- 0=As much as I ever did
- 1=Rather less than I used to
- 2=Definitely less than I used to
- 3=Hardly at all

3. I have blamed myself unnecessarily when things went wrong.

- 3=Yes, most of the time
- 2=Yes, some of the time
- 1=Not very often
- 0=No, never

4. I have been anxious or worried for no good reason.

- 0=No, not at all
- 1=Hardly ever
- 2=Yes, sometimes
- 3=Yes, very often

5. I have felt scared or panicky for no very good reason.

- 3=Yes, quite a lot
- 2=Yes, sometimes
- 1=No, not much
- 0=No, not at all

6. Things have been getting on top of me.

- 3=Yes, most of the time I haven't been able to cope at all
- 2=Yes, sometimes I haven't been coping as well as usual
- 1=No, most of the time I have coped quite well
- 0=No, I have been coping as well as ever

7. I have been so unhappy that I have had difficulty sleeping.

- 3=Yes, most of the time
- 2=Yes, sometimes
- 1=Not very often
- 0=No, not at all

8. I have felt sad or miserable

- 3=Yes, most of the time
- 2=Yes, quite often
- 1=Not very often
- 0=No, not at all

9. I have been so unhappy that I have been crying.

- 3=Yes, most of the time
- 2=Yes, quite often
- 1=Only occasionally
- 0=No, never

10. The thought of harming myself has occurred to me.

- 3=Yes, quite often
- 2=Sometimes
- 1=Hardly ever
- 0=Never

If your score is **12 or higher 2 weeks in a row or question 10 is a positive**, call your provider.

¹ Cox, J.L., Holden, J.M.& Sagovsky, R. (1987) Detection of postnatal depression: Development of the 10-item Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 150, 782-786.

² K. L. Wisner, B. L. Parry, C. M. Piontek, Postpartum Depression *N Engl J Med* vol. 347, No 3, July 18, 2002,194-199.

Resources

- Contact your primary provider. They are the best place to start.
- You can call the Perinatal Emotional Support Program at 269-341-7175. The message phone line is checked once a day. We will return your call and provide you with the resources and support needed.
- You can attend the Postpartum Support Group. There is no cost and infants and partners are welcome to attend with you. Call 269-341-7175 for more information.
- Visit Postpartum Support International's website, postpartum.net
- Visit the Postpartum Stress Center's website, postpartumstress.com
- Call 844-MOM-HOPE (844-666-4673) or visit pinerest.org/mother-baby-postpartum-depression-treatment to learn more about Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services in Grand Rapids Mother/Baby specialized day program.
- You can call Gryphon Place's 24 hour help line, at 269-381-HELP
- Call 911 if it is an emergency and you are in need of immediate help.

Reading

“Beyond the Blues: Understanding and Treating Postpartum Depression and Anxiety” (English and Spanish editions available)

Written by: Shoshana Benett, PhD, and Pec Indman, EdD

Published by: Untreed Reads, 2015 (4th ed.)

“Moods in Motion: A Coloring and Healing Book for Postpartum Moms”

Written by: Karen Kleiman and Illustrated by Lisa Powell Braun

Published by: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016

“Postpartum Depression for Dummies”

Written by: Shoshana Benett, PhD

Published by: Wiley Publishing Inc., 2007

“The Mother-to-Mother Postpartum Depression Support Book”

Written by: Sandra Poulin

Published by: Berkley, 2006

“This Isn't What I Expected”

Written by: Karen Kleiman, MSW, and Valeria Raskin, MD

Published by: DaCapo Life Long, 2013 (2nd ed.)

Information gathered in part from:

“Beyond the Blues” Shoshana Benett, PhD and Pec Indman, EdD

“This Isn't What I Expected”, Karen Kleiman, MSW and Valerie Raskin, MD

Spectrum Health, Healthier Communities, Nancy Roberts, RN, CCE, CBC

Postpartum Support International