



KEEP HEALTH IN MIND

Baby Blues AND BEYOND

The birth of a baby usually brings feelings of joy and new beginnings, but it can also be a time of great stress. This is to be expected. Having a baby is a life-changing event that often leads to huge lifestyle changes for a new mother and her family.

New moms often experience a wide range of emotions during the early weeks after birth. These include feeling sad, anxious, afraid, or confused. These feelings are called the “Baby Blues” and often go away quickly.

Baby Blues:

- Affects up to 70% of new moms
- Occurs within the first 3 to 5 days after birth
- Usually goes away within 1 to 2 weeks.

During the first few weeks, it is important for all new moms to try to:

- Rest when your baby sleeps
- Ask for and accept help
- Say no to demands of others
- Take one day at a time
- Limit your visitors
- Take some time for yourself
- Talk to someone who can reassure you.

When the Baby Blues do not go away or get worse, a mom may be experiencing a more serious type of postpartum mood disorder (PPMD) which requires medical attention.

Who is at risk?

Any new mother can develop a postpartum mood disorder. The cause of this condition is not known. However, there are some factors that increase a mother’s risk:

- Depression during pregnancy
 - Previous postpartum mood disorder
 - Previous mental health issue
 - Family history of postpartum mood disorder or mental health issue
 - Lack of help or support
 - High stress level
 - Tendency to worry
 - Lack of financial resources
 - Previous miscarriage(s) or infertility
 - Unexpected or difficult birth experience
 - High expectations of birth and motherhood
 - Severe premenstrual syndrome.



TYPE OF PPMD

Postpartum Depression

- Affects 10% to 15% of new moms
- May start suddenly or slowly
- It can occur within three weeks of delivery and up to one year after the birth of your baby
- Requires medical attention.

Symptoms

- More intense and longer-lasting symptoms than the “blues”
- Feeling overwhelmed or anxious
- Changes in appetite
- Having no positive feelings about your baby
- Fearing that you might hurt yourself or your baby
- Feeling “out of control”.

Postpartum Psychosis

- Occurs in one to two births per 1000
- Least common mood disorder but most serious
- Onset of symptoms is sudden (in most cases within the first two weeks after the baby is born, but in many cases it occurs in only two to three days after the baby is born)
- Requires immediate medical attention.

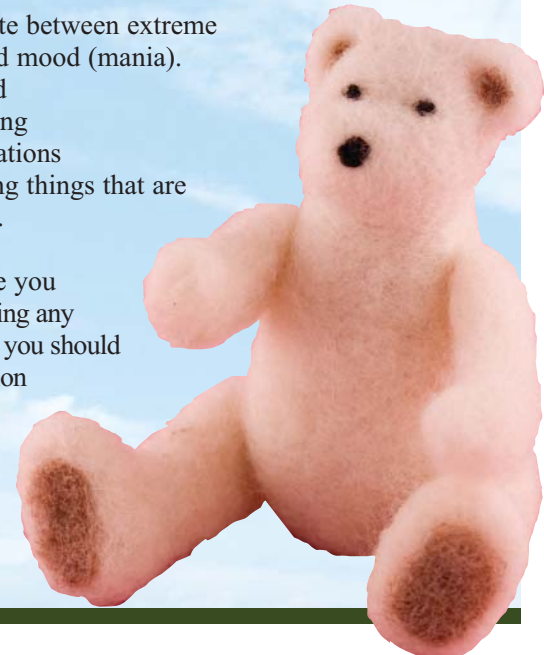
Symptoms

Symptoms fluctuate between extreme depressed or elated mood (mania).

- Feeling paranoid
- Difficulty sleeping
- Having hallucinations (hearing or seeing things that are not really there).

If you, or someone you know, is experiencing any of these symptoms, you should seek medical attention

(See also the **Symptom Checklist for New Moms and their Partners** on page 2).



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Get help!** Talk to someone about how you are feeling. Delaying treatment can delay recovery.
- **Take care of yourself.** Try to sleep when your baby sleeps, eat a healthy diet, and try to be as physically active as possible.
- **Accept your feelings.** It is normal to sometimes feel down. You are adjusting to your baby.
- **Take breaks.** Take time to be by yourself and do something that is relaxing, like taking a bath, reading a magazine, or going for a walk.
- **Ask for support.** It is okay to have help in taking care of your baby and you. Choose someone who is patient and caring.
- **Get counselling.** There are many professionals who can help you cope with your feelings.
- **Consider medication.** Talk with your doctor about which medication may be right for you. You can continue to breastfeed while taking certain medications.
- **Be patient.** Remember, it takes time to recover.
- **Delay major decisions.** Wait until you are feeling better so you can concentrate on finding solutions to problems.

Symptom Checklist for New Moms and their Partners

Read through the list below and check off any symptoms that you have been experiencing. Ask your partner to complete this checklist as well. Bring this checklist to your family physician or health care provider.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bouts of crying | <input type="checkbox"/> Strange behaviour* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear or thoughts of hurting yourself or the baby* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability | <input type="checkbox"/> "Out of control" feelings* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustration | <input type="checkbox"/> Having hallucinations * |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tiredness | <input type="checkbox"/> Paranoia* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with reality* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty sleeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of being overwhelmed | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in appetite | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of feelings for baby | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Panic attacks | *Important: These symptoms require immediate medical attention. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obsessive thoughts | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Racing thoughts | |

Where to get help

It is very important to get treatment because postpartum depression and postpartum psychosis not only affects the mother, but the whole family as well. These conditions may affect how mom and baby interact with each other, may cause behavioural problems in older children, and may cause or increase relationship problems between parents.

Talk with your family doctor, healthcare provider, or a public health nurse if your symptoms last more than 2 weeks.

Seek emergency help:

- If you feel you may harm yourself or your baby, or
- If you think you are experiencing hallucinations or paranoia.

Call:

- 9-1-1: telephone number to report an emergency situation
- Hospital Emergency Room
- Windsor-Essex Distress Centre at **519-973-4435**

A combination of support, medication, and professional counselling is often the most effective method of treatment.



For more information about Postpartum Mood Disorders, call the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit at **519-258-2146 x1350** or **1-800-265-5822** or visit www.wehealthunit.org

Key References:

Ross, L. E., Dennis, C-L., Blackmore, E. R., & Stewart, D. E. (2005). *Postpartum depression: A guide for front-line health and social service providers*. Toronto, Canada: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2005). *Depression during and after pregnancy*. Retrieved October 14, 2005, from www.4woman.gov/faq/postpartum.htm