

Postpartum Depression

10 Ways to Support Mom

■ by Melinda Hammond, PsyD



One of the most common complications after childbirth is depression, affecting 10-15% of women. Often known as Postpartum Depression (PPD) the term encompasses much more than stereotypical depression. Many women also experience mood swings, unexpected anger and severe anxiety.

PPD Causes and Symptoms

PPD is caused by the hormonal shifts at the end of pregnancy. Most new moms experience the “baby blues” – short-term drops in mood and increases in stress. This can be accompanied by night sweats, exhaustion, problems sleeping and anxiety. When it lasts less than 2 weeks, it’s normal, and an expected part of the birth process. It becomes a serious complication when it lasts longer than 2 weeks, keeps a mother from caring for herself or her children, causes her to have thoughts of harming herself, or worsens.

If a woman has any of these symptoms, she or her partner should contact her OB-GYN or the hospital where she gave birth right away. They can help her determine what treatments are most appropriate. Sometimes anti-depressant medication is prescribed, and many

doctors are able to find medications that are safe for nursing. Support groups are commonly found at hospitals. Some doctors will recommend therapy in order to learn coping skills for the process of becoming a mother.

10 Ways to Support New Moms

More importantly, however, the community around a woman can help reduce stress and support her through this process, decreasing the odds that she will develop PPD. If you know a woman who is about to give birth, or has recently given birth, there are great ways to support her.

1. **Enlist your church community or neighborhood.** Create a meal train, or take turns calling the new mother to check in. Some days she may be too tired or overwhelmed to respond, and others she may crave the interaction. Accept her where she is.

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2. **Ask what she needs!** If she says “nothing” or “I don’t know,” be prepared to offer help anyway. Can you make dinner? Clean her house? Take her older children off her hands for a couple of hours?
3. **Be flexible with her schedule.** Many nursing moms can’t predict when they’ll need to feed the baby, so it’s difficult to make plans. Let her know when you can be flexible with her and baby.
4. **Think of ways you can help her find time to sleep.** Lack of sleep can be a huge contributor to PPD. Maybe she needs someone to hold the baby while she naps. More likely, she needs someone to scrub the toilets and wash the floors so she can sleep while the baby sleeps.
5. **Don’t overstay your welcome.** Nothing is more stressful than visitors who hang around, holding the baby, when the mother needs some time to shower, clean, or rest. Short visits (unless invited for longer) are ideal.
6. **Ask what type of conversation she needs.** Some mothers crave advice. Others don’t want advice. Many mothers want to talk about things other than the baby, to feel connected to the outside world.
7. **Support from afar.** Living far away? You can still send food, gift cards or even cleaning services to help a new mom! You can also stay in contact by text or e-mail. Thanks to the internet, “community” no longer just means those nearby.
8. **Mom-centered TLC.** Many new moms need a reminder that they are still important and deserve to be cared for. Consider tucking some mom-centered items in with your baby gifts. Perhaps a nice smelling soap, new nail polish, or even a massage or pedicure gift card would be helpful. After all, she probably hasn’t been able to reach her feet for a few months!
9. **Help her get out of the house!** An outing with a baby can be daunting, especially to first time moms. Having a supportive friend along can help make it easier and lift her spirits.
10. **Keep up the support over time.** After the first couple of weeks, mom might still need help and support. So even if it’s been a month (or six), offer to stop in and help or keep mom company.

We were created by God to live in community with one another. This community can be the cornerstone of a healthy postpartum period. ■



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