

## What is postpartum depression?

Postpartum depression or PPD is a depressive condition that affects one out of eight new mothers. It is brought on by rapid changes in hormonal levels following birth. PPD can occur any time during the first year after giving birth.

New mothers may experience a short period of moodiness following birth often referred to as the baby blues. This condition, caused by rapid hormonal changes following birth, is common and usually lasts a few weeks at the most. Postpartum depression is different from the baby blues because the symptoms are more severe, persistent and often require treatment.

## What causes PPD?

Hormonal changes may trigger symptoms of postpartum depression. During pregnancy, the levels of the female hormones estrogen and progesterone increase greatly. In the first 24 hours after childbirth, hormone levels quickly return to normal. Researchers think the sudden and significant change in hormone levels may lead to depression in some new mothers.

Levels of thyroid hormones may also drop after giving birth. The thyroid is a small gland in the neck that helps regulate how your body uses and stores energy from food. Low levels of thyroid hormones can also cause symptoms of depression.

Other factors contribute to PPD as well. Fatigue following delivery, and from ongoing lack of sleep in the first few weeks after delivery, can put enormous strain on a new mother, as can the tremendous responsibilities of caring for a new baby. These factors, combined with stress caused by changes in routine and life roles, can contribute to the development of PPD.

Some women have a higher risk of developing PPD. Some of the risk factors include:

- Personal history of depression or mental illness
- Family history of depression or mental illness
- Lack of support from family and friends
- Anxiety or negative feelings about pregnancy
- Problems with a previous pregnancy or birth
- Marriage or money problems
- Stressful life events
- Substance abuse

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of PPD are similar to depression. Symptoms of PPD include:

- Feeling sad or down often
- Frequent crying or tearfulness
- Feeling restless, irritable or anxious
- Loss of interest or pleasure in life
- Changes in appetite – eating more or less, or unexpected fluctuations in weight
- Less energy and motivation to do things
- Changes in sleep patterns including trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping more than usual
- Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness or guilt
- Feeling like life isn't worth living
- Feelings or fears of harming oneself or baby
- Obsessive thoughts about the well being of the baby
- Showing little interest in the baby

If these symptoms continue for more than a few weeks, or if they develop and persist anytime during the year following delivery, it may be postpartum depression.

## How does it affect family members?

Studies have shown that prolonged depression in new mothers can affect the healthy development of their babies resulting in delays in language development, difficulty with mother-child bonding, behavior problems and increased crying. Untreated postpartum depression can jeopardize the health of both mother and child, so talking to a doctor about symptoms is important.

## What are the treatments?

Treatments for postpartum depression are similar to treatments for other forms of depression. A physician should be consulted about appropriate medication options and/or talk therapy. Both methods of treatment are effective and will ultimately benefit both mother and baby. Finding support among other new and experienced mothers is also helpful.

## HOW CAN I HELP?

To support your partner....

- Even though it seems hard, keep the lines of communication open
- Acknowledge her emotions, and assure her it will get better.
- Pitch in wherever and whenever you can.
- Offer warmth and affection. Sometimes a simple hug, a held hand or knowing smile can make all the difference.
- Let her know she is a good mother and partner.
- Emphasize the good moments. Acknowledge her progress in recovery.

Self-Care for everyone...

- Adequate rest – whenever possible – and a nutritious diet will lay a firm foundation for recovery.
- Exercise reduces depression and anxiety as it produces brain chemicals that elevate mood.
- Be gently on yourself and your partner. A chemical imbalance is the cause of the condition. It is no one's fault.
- Try to organize tasks so that you don't feel so overwhelmed. Don't try to do everything. Approach tasks one step at a time. Stay in the moment. Remember to breathe deeply.
- Find people you can talk to. Join a local support group. Educate yourself about PPD.
- Don't self-medicate with food, alcohol or other substances.
- Ask for help from a qualified health care professional.

# Postpartum Depression

---

Archbold Northside  
Center for Behavioral and Psychiatric Care

**Archbold Northside  
Center for Behavioral and Psychiatric Care  
401 Old Albany Road  
Thomasville, Georgia 31792**

**24-Hour HELpline: 1-800-238-8661  
or 229-228-8208  
[www.archbold.org/northside](http://www.archbold.org/northside)**

