

# Postpartum depression after giving birth

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a complex but fairly common problem in women who have given birth. Statistics indicate that almost one in ten women suffers from PPD after giving birth. PPD needs medical attention but is often difficult to diagnose and therefore often overlooked. It is a complex mix of physical, emotional, and behavioral signs.

## Causes of PPD and predictors

What causes PPD is not entirely understood, but surely hormonal changes seem to be the primary cause of PPD. During pregnancy, there is a *tenfold* increase in female reproductive hormones (estrogen and progesterone) after child birth, there is sharp fall in their level in a brief period, usually within the first 3 days. This hormonal change often works as a trigger in women.

Apart from hormonal changes, other factors serve as predictors; they are mentioned below in descending order according to their importance:

- *Prenatal depression* – many women show the signs of low mood and loss of interest in life during pregnancy itself.
- *Self-esteem* – women with low self-esteem are at higher risk.
- *Childcare stress* – many women are not mentally ready, or they have exaggerated fears, so they find it difficult to take care of the child.
- *Prenatal anxiety* – some women are more anxious during pregnancy; one must also understand that anxiety is different from depression, an anxious person is more worried about the future, whereas a depressive person feels bad about today. An anxious person has a higher emotional arousal state and physical signs like lack of sleep, high gastric acidity.
- *Life stress* – life conditions are not equal for all, some may have more problems with poor financial situations or lack of proper housing.
- *Social support* – lack of social support is another important risk factor.
- *Marital relationship* – if a woman giving birth is going through a conflict period with a spouse then she has a higher risk of developing PPD.
- *History of previous depression*
- *Infant temperament* – let us face the fact that not all children are the same. Some newborns are harder to look after, and the reasons could be many, but if the child cries more often or for no apparent reason, it has an adverse influence on the mother.
- *Marital status and unwanted pregnancy*

## What are the signs

Depression should not be confused with the “baby blues,” but at the same time they should not be overlooked. Many women have short-lived emotional problems after childbirth, like weeping for no

reason, getting irritated easily, and having unpredictable moods, but usually, these changes do not last long. Depression is a far more severe condition, and the woman feels extreme sadness that disturbs her in fulfilling the role of mother and doing daily activities. It is not just being moody, but rather a complete lack of interest in anything, restlessness, useless worries, and difficulty in going to sleep.

## How to cope with PPD

Women who are breastfeeding are often reluctant to take medical drugs. For such cases, social and family support is the single most important thing that can help her to overcome the depression. Attention by family members and helping her to take care of the child can neutralize her fears and depression. It is equally important that the woman understands her problem and seeks help. Below are the few tips to overcome PPD:

- Actively ask for help and support from others
- Exercise – of course in consultation with a doctor
- Change your mental attitude and understand that not all days are equal
- Increase interaction with family and friends
- Sleep or take rest when a child is sleeping
- Practice mindfulness and breathing exercises
- Don't hesitate to seek help from a professional

### *About the author:*

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Dr. Preet is a family physician, and he has been practicing medicine for last 15 years and has a particular interest in maternal and child health. He understands the importance of the mental health of the mother and its long-term effects on a child. He is also a passionate writer.

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