



Speak Up When You're Down

Common Questions

Q: What is postpartum depression (PPD)?

A: Postpartum depression is a mood disorder that affects a high percentage of women – as many as 1 in 8 – usually within the first year after childbirth, miscarriage, or stillbirth. It is the number one complication of childbirth.

Q: What are the signs of PPD?

A: The warning signs of PPD can be different for everyone but may include:

- Trouble sleeping, or sleeping too much
- Changes in appetite – eating much more or much less
- Feeling irritable, angry, or nervous
- Feeling exhausted
- Not enjoying life as much as in the past
- Lack of interest in baby, friends, family
- Low or no sex drive
- Feeling guilty, worthless or hopeless
- Crying uncontrollably
- Feelings of being a bad mother
- Trouble concentrating
- Low energy
- Thoughts of harming the baby or yourself

Q: Who is at risk for PPD?

A: PPD impacts women of all ages, economic status and racial/ethnic backgrounds. 15 to 20 percent of women who give birth will experience PPD, and up to 80 percent will experience more mild symptoms commonly referred to as the “baby blues.”

No one is fully sure why PPD happens, but risk factors can include:

- Changes in your hormone levels
- A difficult pregnancy
- A birth that did not go as planned
- Medical problems with you or the baby
- Not getting enough sleep
- Feeling alone
- Loss of freedom
- Sudden changes in home or work routines
- Personal or family history of depression
- Prior experience with PPD
- Lack of support from family and friends
- High levels of stress

Q: What can I do to take better care of myself if I get PPD?

A: The good news is that if you have PPD, there are things you can do to take care of yourself:

- Get good, old-fashioned rest. Try to nap when the baby naps.
- Stop putting pressure on yourself to do everything. Do as much as you can and leave the rest! Ask for help with household chores and nighttime feedings.
- Speak up when you're down. Talk to your husband, partner, family, and friends about how you are feeling.
- Do not spend a lot of time alone. Get dressed and leave the house - run an errand or take a short walk.
- Talk to your health care provider about medical treatment. Do not be shy about telling them your concerns. Not all health care providers know how to tell if you have PPD. Ask for a referral to a mental health professional that specializes in treating depression.
- Talk with other mothers, so you can learn from their experiences.
- Join a support group for women with PPD. Call PSI Support International of Washington at 1-888-404-7763 or look in your telephone book for information and services.
- Spend time alone with your husband or partner.

Q: What can I do if I am the husband or partner of a woman who shows symptoms of PPD?

A: Family and friends may feel upset by these mood swings. In fact, they may notice there is a problem before the new mom does. You can help by being patient and supportive. When symptoms last longer than a few weeks, love and support may not be enough. Loved ones should encourage a new mother to seek help right away.

Here are some tips for husbands, partners and family members that can help:

- Learn how to recognize the signs and symptoms of PPD
- Help her recognize the depression
- Help her to follow through on a treatment plan
- Create a safe and nurturing home

Some helpful thoughts to keep in mind:

- You didn't cause her illness and you can't take it away
- She doesn't expect you to "fix it"
- Get the support you need so you can be there for her
- Don't take it personally
- Just being there with and for her is doing a great deal
- Let her sleep at night

Q: What is the Washington State Postpartum Depression Awareness Campaign?

A: In 2005, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 5898 creating a PPD Public Awareness Campaign for families in Washington. In 2007, the campaign was enhanced with additional funding to continue work on this very important health and wellness issue for women and families.

www.del.wa.gov/development/strengthening