

Patient education: Postpartum depression (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is postpartum depression?

Postpartum depression is a kind of depression that some women get after having a baby.

"Postpartum" is another word for the period of time shortly after a woman gives birth. Most women with postpartum depression start having symptoms within a month after giving birth. But it can be up to 12 months before a woman starts having symptoms.

Depression can make you feel sad, down, hopeless, or cranky most of the day, almost every day. Another common sign of depression is no longer enjoying or caring about things you used to like to do.

After having a baby, many women get a mild type of postpartum depression called postpartum blues. Within 2 or 3 days after giving birth, women with postpartum blues might:

- Be moody, irritable, or anxious
- Have trouble concentrating or sleeping
- Have crying spells

In women with postpartum blues, these symptoms are not severe and usually go away within 2 weeks. But in women with postpartum depression, the symptoms are more severe and last longer.

Women who have a history of depression are more likely to get postpartum depression than women who have never been depressed.

What are the symptoms of postpartum depression?

It can be hard to tell if a woman has postpartum depression, since some of the symptoms might also be caused by the stress of taking care of a newborn. For example, it's normal for new mothers to:

- Sleep too much or too little

- Feel tired or lack energy
- Have changes in their appetite, weight, and desire to have sex

But women with postpartum depression might not be able to sleep even when their babies sleep. Or they might have so little energy that they cannot get out of bed for hours.

They might also feel:

- Anxious, irritable, and angry
- Guilty or overwhelmed
- Unable to care for their baby
- Like a failure as a mother

If you want to hurt or kill yourself, see someone right away!

If you ever feel like you might want to hurt yourself or your baby, do one of these things:

- Call your doctor or nurse and tell them it is urgent
- Call for an ambulance (in the US and Canada, dial 9-1-1)
- Go to the emergency room at your local hospital
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255; www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

How is postpartum depression treated?

Treatments for depression can also be used to treat postpartum depression. The two main treatments for depression are:

- Taking medicines to relieve depression
- Talking with a therapist (such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, nurse, or social worker)

Women who are breastfeeding might need to avoid certain medicines. When a nursing mother takes medicine, small amounts of the medicine can be found in her breast milk. This might be unhealthy for the baby. But not treating depression can also be harmful for both the mother and her baby, and there are many medicines for depression that do not seem to harm the baby. Your doctor can help you decide if you need medicine and the best one to take.

Can postpartum depression be prevented?

Maybe. If you have had postpartum depression before, you are more likely to get it again. You are also at higher risk if you have had depression in the past, even if you have not been pregnant before.

If you had postpartum depression before and took a medicine that helped you feel better, your doctor might prescribe that medicine to take again after the next time you give birth. Or your doctor might suggest talking to a therapist to help prevent postpartum depression.

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