



## the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Postpartum Depression**

**P**ostpartum depression (PPD) is a psychiatric illness that causes feelings of extreme sadness, hopelessness, insomnia, and anxiety in a woman who has recently given birth. The onset of postpartum usually begins sometime within the first six weeks of delivery. According to CNN.com, approximately 10 - 15 percent of all new mothers and 25 - 30 percent of teen-age mothers experience postpartum depression. PPD has a powerful affect on a woman's thoughts, feelings, physical health, behavior, and overall functioning. While similar to the "baby blues" (see below), postpartum depression is more severe and longer-lasting with symptoms including: anxiety, sadness, despair, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, fatigue, difficulty concentrating and/or decision making, changes in appetite and/or sleep, and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

Any new mother can develop PPD; however, certain factors increase the risk, such as a history of psychiatric illness, family history of depression or anxiety disorders, a poor marital relationship - especially an abusive relationship, lack of social supports (such as family and friends), and the stress of caring for other children.

The Office on Women's Health web site ([www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)) offers the following descriptions of the three ranges of postpartum conditions:

### **Signs & Symptoms**

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities, including sex
- Restlessness, irritability, or excessive crying
- Feelings of guilt, or worthlessness
- Sleeping too much or too little, early-morning awakening
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down"
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Persistent physical symptoms, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

- **THE BABY BLUES** OCCURS IN MANY NEW MOTHERS IN THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING CHILDBIRTH. IT IS CHARACTERIZED BY MOOD SWINGS, WHICH RANGE FROM EUPHORIA TO INTENSE SADNESS.
- **POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION** OCCURS IN ROUGHLY 10% OF PREGNANCIES RESULT IN POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION, WHICH CAN OCCUR A FEW DAYS OR EVEN MONTHS AFTER DELIVERY. POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION CAN OCCUR AFTER THE BIRTH OF ANY CHILD, NOT JUST THE FIRST. IT OFTEN DISRUPTS A WOMAN'S ABILITY TO FUNCTION, WHICH IS THE KEY SIGN THAT MEDICAL ATTENTION IS NECESSARY.
- **POSTPARTUM PSYCHOSIS**, A SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS THAT AFFECTS APPROXIMATELY 1 IN 1000 NEW MOTHERS. ONSET IS SEVERE AND QUICK, USUALLY WITHIN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS AFTER DELIVERY. WOMEN WHO SUFFER FROM POSTPARTUM PSYCHOSIS MAY COMPLETELY LOSE TOUCH WITH REALITY, OFTEN EXPERIENCING HALLUCINATIONS AND DELUSIONS. OTHER SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE INSOMNIA, AGITATION, AND BIZARRE FEELINGS AND BEHAVIOR.

Men are also vulnerable to "new baby" emotions. One study found that 62 percent of fathers felt depressed some time after the first four months following the birth of their baby.



## What Treatments Are Available for PPD?

The most commonly used treatments for postpartum depression is psychotherapy and antidepressant medication, or a combination of the two. A woman with mild symptoms of postpartum might improve with psychotherapy alone, but a woman with severe symptoms almost always requires an antidepressant. Support groups and family therapy sessions are often recommended.

The onset of postpartum usually begins sometime within the first six weeks of delivery, but not within the first two weeks. If a woman continues breastfeeding, some of the antidepressant medication may enter her breast milk and be passed to her nursing child. For this very reason, the woman psychiatrist and pediatrician will work together to find an antidepressant that is both effective for the mother and relatively safe for the new baby. Most women will make a full recovery, but they are at risk of recurrent episodes of depression with subsequent pregnancies, at menopause, or during times of high stress.



## Are You at Risk for Postpartum Depression?

- by the HealthAtoZ.com web site

### ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS...

- Are you feeling totally exhausted and lacking in enthusiasm for things that once seemed pleasurable?
- Are you over concerned about the health of your baby, constantly worrying about what could go wrong?
- Do you feel like most days you are “out of control” or “going crazy”?
- Do you find yourself crying uncontrollably for unexplained reasons?
- Are you filled with self-doubt and lacking in self-esteem?
- Do you feel anxious, tense or panicked much of the day?
- Do you often feel helpless, hopeless and unable to cope?
- Do you feel more distant from your spouse or partner?
- Do you ever think of hurting yourself or your baby?
- Have you experienced sudden changes in appetite?
- Are you experiencing difficulty sleeping?
- Is it difficult for you to concentrate?

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

**Web Site** [www.portagepath.org](http://www.portagepath.org)

**Appointments** 330-253-3100  
800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

**Support Hotline** 330-434-9144  
888-434-8878



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