

## Depression After Childbirth:

# IS IT THE “BABY BLUES” OR SOMETHING MORE?

### What is the “baby blues”?

Mood swings, crying spells, and irritability are common after giving birth. This is not unusual as your body readjusts itself after the momentous events of childbirth. Following childbirth, the “baby blues” occurs with such frequency (50-80%) that it is often a normal part of the period after childbirth. The “baby blues” is usually observed two to five days after childbirth. You may experience periods of weeping, mood swings, being overly sensitive, feeling overwhelmed, and just plain exhausted. This phase usually passes in a matter of days to a few weeks, as you and your body adjust to your new situation. It may help to discuss your feelings with friends or family. Don't be afraid to ask for help, especially when you need to sleep, and tell your healthcare professional how you are feeling.

### How does depression with postpartum onset differ from the baby blues?

The “baby blues” is short-lived, ending without treatment within a week or so. Any symptoms that are severe or that persist after two weeks should be discussed with your doctor or other healthcare provider. Women who suffer from depression with postpartum onset are *persistently* depressed for more than two weeks.

Typical symptoms, which are present for at least two weeks, most of the time, include:

- Feelings of sadness or low mood; feeling “down”
- Loss of interest and/or pleasure in usual activities
- Difficulty concentrating
- General fatigue and loss of energy
- Difficulty sleeping or an increased need for sleep
- Significant weight or appetite loss or gain
- Excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Recurring thoughts about death or suicide

In addition, feelings of unexplained anxiety and/or irritability may be present

Significant difficulty in the ability to care for your baby, care for yourself, and cope with family relationships may also be a symptom of depression with postpartum onset.

### **How common is depression with postpartum onset?**

8 to 12% of new mothers show symptoms of depression with postpartum onset. Women who have had a previous episode of depression are more likely to experience depression after childbirth. Those women who have had depression with postpartum onset are more likely to experience it again.

### **What triggers depression with postpartum onset?**

Why some women experience depression with postpartum onset and others do not is not fully understood. What is important is that it can and should be treated. If you have any of the symptoms noted, nearly every day for at least two weeks, discuss them with your doctor or other healthcare provider. Together, you can decide what, if any, action should be taken.

Childbirth is a major event that affects the body and the mind. It is not unusual to have mixed feelings or even resentment while you are recovering from childbirth and caring for a new baby. Don't be embarrassed or afraid to discuss your feelings with friends, family, and your healthcare provider.

### **Resources (Support Groups):**

#### **Depression After Delivery**

Patient Inquiry: 1-800-944-4PPD

#### **Postpartum Support International (PSI)**

Patient Inquiry: 1-805-967-7636

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