

# What you need to know about postpartum depression

## What is Postpartum Depression or PPD?

Postpartum Depression (postpartum means “after birth”) is a condition that describes a wide range of physical and emotional changes that some women go through after having a baby. For many women, these feelings go away quickly. When these feelings do not go away or get worse, this may be PPD.

## Baby Blues are temporary and expected

Baby Blues—also known as Postpartum Blues—is a mild condition, and it should not be confused with PPD. Symptoms of Baby Blues include tearfulness, mood swings, irritability and anxiety. These symptoms go away after about 12 days. This condition affects at least 50 percent of new moms. Tips to cope with Baby Blues include:

- **Getting rest** – nap when the baby sleeps, and let friends help you with errands, chores or child care.
- **Find time** - even 15 minutes a day - to do something for yourself.
- **Eat nutritious meals** including a variety of fruits, vegetables and lean meat or fish. Try to stay away from caffeine, alcohol and sugar.
- **Exercise** – try taking a walk around the block to boost your metabolism and your spirits.
- **Seek support** from family and friends about your worries and concerns. Talking about your concerns helps keep things in perspective.



## PPD is serious and stays

Postpartum Depression is a much more serious condition. It starts in the first days or weeks after delivery.

Symptoms include:

- Loss of pleasure in life activities
- Heavy fatigue
- Slowness
- Restlessness
- Feelings of guilt
- Hopelessness
- Not feeling worthy
- In extreme cases, thoughts of death or suicide

Some moms become overly worried about their baby, whereas others experience the opposite reaction and lose interest in their baby. A very small group of depressed moms fear that they may hurt their baby.

If you have these symptoms contact your doctor to discuss your feelings and concerns. **If you have been thinking about suicide or death contact your doctor immediately.**

## Who is at risk for PPD?

Any woman who has a baby can develop PPD.

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## The big risk is denial

Probably the biggest risk for a new mom is to ignore her depression or to call it the blues when it really is more serious. Some women put off getting help because of fatigue or because they are overly concerned about what family and friends might think. A new mom can experience guilt about feeling depressed when she is “supposed” to be excited and happy about her baby. It is very important to understand it is not the mother’s fault and it is not a sign of being a weak or an unstable person.

## Great news - it’s treatable!

Postpartum Depression is a medical illness, which is treatable with both medication and counseling. Untreated symptoms can get worse and last as long as a year. But with treatment women can, and do, get better.

## Get help now

The first step toward feeling better is to tell your doctor about your concerns and feelings. For a referral to a behavioral health provider near you, or for immediate assistance, contact ValueOptions, Harvard Pilgrim’s behavioral health partner. Call toll free: **1-888-777-4742, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.**

For more information about PPD, visit [www.harvardpilgrim.org](http://www.harvardpilgrim.org), click on *Health and Wellness*, then *Search Health Topics*, and look for Postpartum Depression in the *A to Z Database*. Additional information is also available at the National Institute of Mental health at 1-866-615-NIMH (6464), toll-free or visit their web site at [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov).