

## Description of postpartum mood disorders

**Postpartum 'blues':** (affecting 60-80% of all new mothers) is often expressed as frequent and prolonged crying, anxiety, irritability, poor sleep, quick mood changes and a sense of vulnerability. It usually occurs within the first three days following birth, continues for a few weeks and is usually self-limiting.

**Postpartum depression:** (affecting 10-20% of all new mothers) is more debilitating and longer lasting than the "blues" and is characterized by despondency, tearfulness and more intense feelings of inadequacy, guilt, anxiety and fatigue. There may also be physical symptoms such as headaches and rapid heart rate. A lack of feeling for the baby is of special concern. These feelings can appear any time during the first few months to one year after the birth. Unfortunately, women experiencing this form of depression rarely seek treatment although almost all respond well.

**Postpartum psychosis:** or puerperal psychosis (found in 0.1% of new mothers) is a serious but relatively rare disorder with reactions such as extreme confusion, refusal to eat, delusions, auditory hallucinations, hyperactivity and rapid or irrational speech. Most of these reactions occur within 3-14 days following the birth. Psychosis is serious and requires immediate medical attention and at times medication and hospitalization.

# Postpartum Depression Illinois Alliance

Have you recently given birth?

Do you know someone?

Feeling exhausted, anxious, depressed or just not yourself?

Help is available. You are not alone!

Illinois Chapter of  
Postpartum Support International

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# Knowledge

Many women are not prepared for the wide range of feelings they may have after the birth of their baby. They often experience sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, worry or a sense of inadequacy. Every mother is different and may have different combinations of feelings

## A mother may:

- Feel constantly tired
- Cry often for no apparent reason
- Feel panicky
- Worry excessively about her own or the baby's health
- Have a lack of feeling for the baby
- Have difficulty sleeping or eating
- Have problems concentrating
- Have frightening thoughts or fantasies
- Feel an overwhelming sense of loss

These confusing emotions and experiences can be symptoms of postpartum mood disorders and there is help available.



# Understanding

Some comments from women experiencing postpartum problems:

## Mothers:

- "I feel like running away."*
- "I don't feel like myself anymore."*
- "I'm a rotten person, a rotten mother."*
- "I feel like I'm going crazy!"*
- "I sometimes think of hurting the baby or myself."*

## Partners:

- "I never know what to expect when I get home"*
- "Will my partner ever be the same?"*
- "Something is horribly wrong, but I don't know how to help her."*
- "It's tough to live with a depressed person."*

## Families:

- "Will it ever end?"*
- "I'm so worried about my daughter."*
- "Mommy doesn't play with me anymore!"*
- "Mommy cries all the time."*

## What causes it & who's at risk?

The real cause of postpartum mood disorders are complicated. Some researchers think it is due to the rapid hormonal changes linked to pregnancy and birth or those with a family and/or personal history of psychiatric problems. Others feel personality and coping skills, if not fully developed, make one vulnerable. Still others argue that lack of social support and information may be responsible. Researchers seem to agree that some of the following social risks may predict problems: recent death of a loved one, economic stress, a recent move, relationship problems, etc. No doubt biological, psychological and social factors all play a role.

# What Helps...

If you are a woman experiencing these feelings, or if you are observing these signs in a friend or family member, contact your health care provider. A complete medical evaluation, including thyroid screening, is necessary. Psychiatric evaluation may be needed. Psychological counseling can be therapeutic. Sometimes medication is recommended. It is very helpful to become a member of a new mother's support group that will provide emotional support and information.

Most women suffering from postpartum mood disorders realize that something is wrong, but often do not seek help. The important thing to remember is that the symptoms are temporary and treatable with skilled professional care and social support. It is important to remember that you will recover.

For more information, call  
the PPDIL Helpline  
847-205-4455, or visit our  
website at [www.ppdil.org](http://www.ppdil.org)