



# Postpartum Mood Disorders

by Jill Kelsey

*After a woman gives birth, several hormonal shifts occur in her body. Some of them are quite sudden and drastic. Depending on a number of mental and physiological factors, a woman may not handle these hormonal fluctuations very well; this is especially the case if she is stressed, malnourished, or sleep-deprived. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of the symptoms and signs of postpartum mood disorders so that you can ensure that mom gets the help she needs as soon as possible. Missing these symptoms can have lasting effects on the mother and influence infant health and the health of close relationships. Symptom awareness can reduce marital or partner friction, especially if both partners take preventative measures to enhance overall well-being in the household.*

**Postpartum Mood Disorders** are sub-categorized into three psychiatric illnesses: **postpartum psychosis** (occurring in the first week postpartum), **postpartum blues** or "baby blues" (occurring within the first 14 days), and **postpartum depression** (PPD - occurring any time up to post-weening, which can be a year or two, or more in some cases, depending on the mother's physical health).

Many women experience some level of mood shift, anxiety, or depression as a result of fluctuating hormones after delivering the baby; however, according to [womansmentalhealth.org](http://womansmentalhealth.org), 10-15% of women experience more significant forms of depression and anxiety that can cause problems with relationships and mental health.

# Warning Signs of PostPartum Mood Disorder

Contact your medical care provider if you experience these symptoms or find they worsen over time. For symptoms of psychosis, contact emergency services:

- Suicide Hotline (USA): Dial or Text 988
- Emergency Services (USA): Dial 911

Warning signs of postpartum depression (PPD) may include any of the following:

- Mood swings (e.g., feelings of shame, anger, sadness, guilt, inadequacy, hopelessness, fear, or anxiousness)
- Irritability and restlessness
- Insomnia/Sleep issues outside of the infant's sleep, care, or feeding schedules
- Severe anxiety or panic attack
- Frequent crying spells (although some crying is normal)
- Intrusive thoughts
- Loss or sudden increase in appetite with weight changes
- Inability or difficulty bonding with the baby
- Overwhelming exhaustion or lack of energy
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Withdrawing from friends and family

Symptoms of postpartum psychosis include experiencing three or more of the following and require immediate intervention:

- Experiencing hallucinations or delusions
- Paranoia
- Excessive energy and preoccupation with the baby
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feeling confused or lost
- Suicidal thoughts and/or thoughts of harming self or baby

## Warning Signs (cont.)

**New fathers can also experience PPD**, and many of the symptoms are similar; however, this is not necessarily hormone-related but is occurring for different reasons (e.g., pre-existing medical or psychiatric conditions, a history of depression, sleep deprivation, changing roles, increased responsibility, feeling trapped, lack of intimacy, etc.).

Genetics may play a role in PPD; this is especially a potential if you have the MTHFR or other genetic mutation that influences how folate is metabolized and absorbed in the body. Folate and many other vitamins, minerals, and enzymes can deplete during pregnancy, birth, and lactation, resulting in system-wide nutritional imbalances that may manifest as mood fluctuations, sleep disturbances, gas and bloating, irritability, hair loss, anxiety, and more.

## Tips to Reduce the Chance of Experiencing A Postpartum Mood Disorder

**Learn about normal infant development and phases.** Knowing when crying spells are generally expected can provide needed stress relief for couples, especially when sleep-deprived in the early days. Be especially alert to the baby's high, sharp, shrieking cries that could indicate pain or a problem. Other cries generally result from hunger, tiredness, a dirty diaper, or one or more of the five senses, and these needs remain unmet.

## Tips to Reduce the Change of Experiencing A Mood Disorder (cont.)

**Develop a clear communication strategy.** If you can find the best way to communicate with your partner while stressed and remember to be patient with each other on delivery, conversations will go more smoothly, and needs will be easier to meet.

**Get the nervous system into rest-and-digest mode.** If the body is in a fight-or-flight nervous system response, it is incapable of digesting optimally and, therefore, also incapable of properly resting, recovering, and balancing hormones. All of these are needed to counteract PPD.

**Consume nutrient-dense foods appropriate for your situation.** New mothers in postpartum have very specific dietary needs. Some foods are much more difficult to digest in postpartum due to a depletion of specific vitamins, minerals, and enzymes from pregnancy and lactation. More resources are available for this in our member's area.

**Get Active.** Engage in some form of physical activity, whether gentle stretching, pilates, yoga, a walk, or more intense exercise in later stages. Consult your medical professional first, however. The point of this is to move oxygen around your body. After the 6-week point in postpartum, most women are cleared to begin regular exercise regimes, including running, which can elevate 'feel good' endorphins that act like analgesics (or diminish feelings of pain) in those experiencing depression. (1)

## Tips (cont.)

**Be patient with your co-parent or partner.** As you explore new roles as parents and new relationship dynamics, it is important to be patient and understanding. The living circumstances will never be like they were before the baby arrived, but you can use these early days of parenting to purposefully work together to create something new and beautiful - forging a healthy new dynamic built on love, respect, and intention.

If you notice mom having a problem with depression but she does not recognize the problem herself, be proactive in making sure she is out of fight or flight and find out how to resolve her needs without being confrontational. Once she is out of fight or flight, make sure to have an adult discussion on how to proceed in a way that benefits everyone's well-being. It is essential to remain as diligent as possible in being a positive influence during postpartum and the early years to keep this temporary mental health challenge from affecting your long-term relationship and the health of your baby.

**For additional resources on postpartum mood disorders, I highly recommend checking out the Mayo Clinic's website. It will also give reference to medical treatment options, etc.**

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