

# Postpartum Depression

## What is postpartum depression?

Postpartum depression is a common illness that can happen after giving birth. It can begin right after the baby is born, or up to a year later. Postpartum depression can make it hard to do everyday tasks, take care of yourself, or take care of your baby.

Many new moms go through “baby blues” — mood swings, irritability, crying spells, or anxiety that fade within a week or two. But for some new moms, the symptoms are more intense or don’t go away.

## What are the symptoms of postpartum depression?

You may have postpartum depression if you have several of the symptoms listed below, if the symptoms are intense, and if they occur each day for more than 2 weeks:

- Feelings of sadness that last most of the day
- Frequent crying
- Lack of appetite
- Trouble sleeping
- Severe tiredness or wanting to sleep all the time
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Loss of interest in people and activities
- Trouble concentrating
- Negative feelings about the baby
- Thoughts of hurting yourself or the baby
- Intense anger, anxiety, or irritability
- Feeling confused, seeing or hearing things that aren’t there, or having thoughts that don’t make sense

Postpartum depression is an illness caused by chemicals in the brain — it’s not a reflection on your character or your parenting. It can be treated so that you can feel better and enjoy your baby.



## What do I need to do next?

- 1** Recognize the symptoms of postpartum depression, and talk to your doctor if they occur every day for at least 2 weeks.
- 2** Take good care of yourself by relying on friend and family support, eating healthy, exercising, getting enough sleep, and taking some time for yourself each day.
- 3** If you are planning a future pregnancy and have a history of postpartum depression, talk with your doctor. Also, ask family and friends to be supportive.



## When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you have any of the symptoms listed at left for more than a couple of weeks, if they’re getting worse, or if they make it hard to do everyday tasks.

Go to an emergency room or call 911 if you have thoughts of harming yourself or your baby. Don’t wait for things to get better on their own. The safety of you and your baby is at stake, so seek emergency help.

## How is postpartum depression diagnosed and treated?

To diagnose postpartum depression, a doctor will talk with you about your symptoms and may ask you to fill out a questionnaire. It can help to bring a family member or friend to the appointment to give perspective and support. Treatment can include:

- **Medicine.** Antidepressant medicine is a proven treatment, and several types are generally safe to use while breastfeeding.
- **Counseling.** A counselor can help you find new ways to manage stress, cope with feelings, and solve problems.

Your doctor might recommend medicine, counseling, or both. If the symptoms are severe or dangerous, treatment might involve a short hospital stay or additional therapies.

Without treatment, postpartum depression can last up to a year or longer. But with treatment, you can begin to feel better within a few weeks or months. The earlier you get treatment, the faster you recover.

## How can I best take care of myself?

Along with getting treatment, there are other ways you can speed your recovery. You need and deserve to take good care of yourself during this time. Here are some ways to do this:

- **Stay close to people who can support you.** Don't shut out concerned family and friends. Talk to them about how you're feeling. Let them help in practical ways. If you know other new moms, get together and share your experiences.
- **Don't be alone.** If your depression symptoms are severe, ask a family member or friend to stay with you if your partner has to go to work.
- **Try to get some physical activity every day.** For example, taking a walk outdoors with your baby can help your mood. (If you have other children, ask someone to watch them while you get some exercise.)

- **Take it easy on yourself.** Don't worry about getting everything done. It's okay to lower your expectations, and it's okay to ask for help.
- **Try to get enough sleep.** If you're having trouble sleeping, take a nap while your baby is asleep. If you have other children, it may help to have someone watch them so you get some sleep while the baby sleeps.
- **Make healthy food choices.** Try to eat more fruits and vegetables and drink plenty of water. Stay away from alcohol.
- **Make time for yourself.** Let someone watch the baby (and other kids, if you have them) so you can do something you enjoy. For example, take a long shower, have some alone time with your partner, or eat lunch with a friend.

## What about future pregnancies?

If you've had an episode of postpartum depression, you have a higher risk of having it again after future pregnancies. Here are 2 ways you can help to prevent or manage postpartum depression:

- 1 **As soon as you find out you're pregnant, tell your doctor about your history of postpartum depression.** Your doctor may schedule a checkup soon after the baby is born to check for symptoms of postpartum depression. Depending on your history, your doctor may recommend starting an antidepressant as soon as the baby is born.
- 2 **Prepare ahead of time so you have a support system in place.** Talk to the people who love you and ask for help in advance. Friends and family can plan to help with practical tasks or watch the baby so you can get some time to yourself.

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