

Adjusting to Motherhood

Most new mothers feel incredible joy when their newborn is safely snuggled in their arms. At the same time, many women experience short term depression after the birth of their baby due to the physical, emotional and lifestyle changes that come with motherhood. A few women will experience more intense depression and may need assistance to balance their needs and emotions.

Pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding involve many physical changes, affecting a woman's body image. Hormonal and chemical changes may leave a new mom feeling sad or anxious. Lifestyle changes may result in fatigue, isolation or feeling overwhelmed.

On top of all this change, a new mother is also learning how to care for her new baby!

Most women eventually figure out how to balance the changes of motherhood. They learn how to get some sleep, connect with the outside world and flow with their new role. For some women, this balance is not easy to attain. Feelings of sadness, anxiety, fatigue, isolation or being overwhelmed may continue – and may interfere with daily life and taking care of baby.

What have women found helps them to restore balance to their life?

- Do not be afraid to **tell someone** how you are feeling and allow them to help you take some action to feel better. This might be your partner, a friend or family member, your midwife, doula, doctor or lactation consultant.
- Make sure you **cover the basics of life**: adequate sleep, nutritious food and some mild exercise. Get sleep whenever you can. Keep small containers of ready-to-eat meat, cheese, nuts, veggies, fruits and whole wheat crackers for you to snack on throughout the day. Get outside (with baby in a stroller or a sling), walk at the mall, or take a fitness class with other new moms.
- Spend **time with other new moms**. Research has shown that mothers who spend time with other mothers have more realistic expectations and experience a smoother postpartum adjustment. Consider attending a mom's group at MilkWorks.
- Understand that your **life may be a bit chaotic**. Things may feel out of order. You may not accomplish what you are used to accomplishing. Take a full six weeks to recover from pregnancy and birth and learn how to take care of your baby and yourself.
- **Ask for help** for household tasks, errands and caring for your baby. Do not be afraid to let others know what is helpful to you.
- Consider seeing a **counselor or therapist** to help process everything that is happening. This may be covered by your insurance plan.

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- If you have been on an **anti-depressant** during pregnancy, it is recommended that you not make any drastic changes in medication. Most SSRI anti-depressants are considered safe while breastfeeding. Your physician can help you make this decision. Zoloft and Paxil are often recommended when a mother is breastfeeding and she needs an anti-depressant. Many anti-depressants take weeks to have an impact, but with new mothers, the effect is often seen more quickly.
- Some mothers have been helped with **progesterone injections**. They are usually given short term because they may interfere with milk supply.
- **Omega 3 fatty acids** –fish oil or flax seed oil supplements – may help with lifting depression.

Be patient. Be understanding and accepting of yourself. Your goal is to improve and adjust to motherhood. This may not happen overnight. But everything you are going through will make you a wiser mother.

How does postpartum depression impact breastfeeding?

Generally the hormones released during breastfeeding tend to help mothers cope. However, it is important to not let breastfeeding problems complicate depression. Many moms will choose to continue breastfeeding because it is important to them. Just make sure you continue to get help from your lactation consultant. Other mothers will do a combination of pumping and breastfeeding to keep their options open. It is most important that you treat your depression so you can adjust to motherhood.

Will a fussy baby make depression worse?

If you have a fussy baby, you may find your depression worsens. Babies are born with different personalities and some babies are more fussy than others. Often we do not know why. Make sure that your baby is gaining weight appropriately (both over-feeding and under-feeding may make your baby fussy) and talk to your doctor if you have concerns about your baby's fussiness. Being at your breast is usually calming to a baby. You may find it helps to have your baby sleep in a side car sleeper, swaddle your baby, or wear your baby in a sling. You may also find it is very helpful to have someone else hold your baby now and then. Accept the help.

All mothers need to know that being depressed is not a reflection upon their ability as a mother. Depression is a clinical situation that requires attention. It is not your fault you are feeling this way.

If at any time you are concerned that you may hurt yourself or your baby, put your baby in a safe place and call **someone who will help you seek medical attention**. Ask your family to support you during these periods and help care for your baby. Some women benefit from being admitted to the hospital for a short time period. Just remember, there is help and support for depression.