



Understanding Postpartum Depression

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Adjusting to you new baby . . .

Bringing a new baby home may universally and widely be agreed upon as one of the most joyous and wonderful of life occasions. And so it is! A new baby brings to those acquainted some of the most pleasurable sensations such as hope, sweetness, innocence and love. This monumental life transition brings forth positive emotions and responses in full intensity. To many new parents, it may bring unexpected feelings and reactions, as well.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, approximately one in ten new mothers will experience some degree of **Postpartum Depression**. The symptoms associated with this condition are:

- Sluggishness
- fatigue and exhaustion
- feelings of hopelessness
- disturbance in sleep and appetite
- confusion, uncontrollable crying
- lack of interest in the baby
- fear of harming the baby or oneself
- mood swings.

These symptoms may last anywhere from just days after delivery to even a year later.

It doesn't take long to find stories of such conditions in our society. In summer of 2005, Brooke Shields spoke openly of her bout with Postpartum Depression, helping many understand the condition more. Although it was June of 2001 when Andrea Yates drowned her five children in Texas, many remember the coverage of this event vividly. Andrea plead not guilty by reason of insanity, and the family had been noted to say that she had experienced a history of depression.

Unfortunately, there are other stories, as well. The travesty of such an event clearly indicates the importance to know and understand early warning signs.

Postpartum Depression is not to be confused with baby blues, which is an extremely common reaction in up to seventy percent of new mothers. The difference with the baby blues is that the symptoms are not prolonged, do not usually interfere with functioning and have less severe reactions. The symptoms to watch for with baby blues are crying for no reason, irritability, restlessness and anxiety. For most new mothers, after the initial adjustments to caring for their newborn are satisfied, these symptoms subside. (Any possibilities for a little extra sleep usually help bring these improvements even more quickly!)

How does Postpartum Depression even develop in the first place? It is usually caused by changes in hormones and may run in families. In order to be effectively treated, a medical evaluation should be done to rule out psychological problems. A psychiatric evaluation, with possible medication and therapy together can reduce the symptoms in the most effective manner. Of course, the ability to ask for help is an important component to reaching these goals.

Many new mothers, however, are reluctant to do so, perhaps brought on by the barrage of information in our media and society conveying the message that this is to be the most pleasurable of life changes. Or it may be that most new moms are incorporating strong, natural nurturing characteristics, which at the time leads them to believe that it's most important to care for their baby and family members or friends noticing concerning signs encourage new parents to seek appropriate help.

With the right help, it is likely that symptoms will dissipate in a timely fashion, and parents and family members can get on with their lives in the healthiest possible way, allowing for plenty of great energy to be able to give to their young ones. Now, time for all those wonderful baby cuddles, cooing and sweet baby moments!

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