

# Postpartum depression: What it is, symptoms & treatments

May 16 2023, by Ann Schreiber

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Becoming a mother is an experience like no other—a time of joy,

anticipation and love. But, for some women, new motherhood can come with challenging emotions.

Many [women](#) struggle with feelings of sadness, anxiety and overwhelming exhaustion. These emotional struggles, coupled with the physical demands of caring for a newborn, can be signs of a condition called postpartum depression (PPD).

## What is postpartum depression?

[About 1 in 7 women develop PPD](#), according to StatPearls. This mood disorder happens after childbirth. It's characterized by [persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety and despair](#) that can significantly impact a woman's ability to function and care for herself and her baby, according to the Mount Sinai Hospital Health Library.

## Postpartum depression symptoms

According to Mount Sinai, PPD typically begins within the first few weeks after delivery, although it can develop up to 6 months after giving birth. Its exact cause is not fully understood, but hormone changes, [emotional factors](#) and lifestyle contributors such as [lack of support](#), sleep deprivation and stress can contribute.

The most common postpartum depression symptoms cited in the article include:

- Persistent sadness, hopelessness and feelings of emptiness
- Changes in appetite, leading to significant weight loss or weight gain
- Sleep disturbances, including insomnia or excessive sleeping

- Fatigue and loss of energy
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions or remembering things
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Irritability, agitation or restlessness
- Feelings of worthlessness, guilt or self-blame
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

PPD shares similarities with major or minor depression in terms of its emotional symptoms and the woman's ability to care for her newborn. ["Although the criteria are the same, how it presents can often be different, or it can be masked by the fact that they are pregnant,"](#) said [Dr. Tiffany Moore Simas](#), chair of obstetrics and gynecology at University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School. She added that there is much can be dangerous for mother and baby: difficulty bonding, loss of appetite, fatigue, insomnia and feelings of guilt.

The other difference between [postpartum depression](#) and the "baby blues" is that PPD symptoms persist for more than two weeks and continue to impair a mother's ability to function.

## **How long does postpartum depression last?**

[Left untreated, PPD can last several years](#), according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health. For some women, symptoms persist beyond the first year after giving birth and extend into the child's toddler years. It's important to note that with appropriate treatment and support, many women can recover from PPD and regain their emotional well-being much sooner.

## **What causes postpartum depression?**

[PPD may owe to a combination of biological, hormonal, psychological and social factors](#), according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). These include:

- **Hormonal changes:** After childbirth, estrogen and progesterone levels plunge. These hormonal fluctuations, similar to those experienced before a woman's menstrual period, can trigger depression and mood swings.
- **History of depression:** Women who have previously experienced [depression](#), whether before, during or after pregnancy, are at an increased risk for PPD.
- **Emotional factors:** Doubts and uncertainties about the pregnancy are common and can influence emotional well-being. Unplanned or [unwanted pregnancies](#) can affect how a woman feels about her pregnancy and the developing fetus. Even with planned pregnancies, adjusting to the idea of a new baby may take time. Parents of sick infants or those requiring extended hospital stays may experience sadness, anger or guilt, which can affect their self-esteem and ability to cope with stress.
- **Fatigue:** The physical demands of childbirth and the subsequent recovery can cause profound fatigue. It can also take weeks, and even longer, for women who have had cesarean sections to regain their strength and energy. The persistent exhaustion can contribute to feelings of emotional vulnerability and increase the risk of PPD.
- **Lifestyle factors:** Lack of support from others and stressful life events, such as the recent loss of a loved one, family illnesses or relocation to a new city, can significantly up the risk for PPD. These external stressors can amplify the emotional challenges faced during the [postpartum](#) period.

## **Postpartum depression treatments**

The Mayo Clinic says the [duration of treatment and recovery for postpartum depression can vary based on the severity of your depression and your unique needs](#). If you have an underactive thyroid or any underlying health conditions contributing to your PPD, your [health care provider](#) may address those conditions or refer you to a specialist who can provide appropriate treatment.

When the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved [the first medication specifically designed to treat PPD](#) in 2019, it marked a major milestone. A combination of medication and support from a mental health professional can provide support tailored to your needs.

## Resources for PPD help

Understanding the symptoms, risk factors and available resources is crucial for supporting women with PPD on their path to recovery. If you or a loved one are experiencing signs of PPD, you can seek help from health care professionals who can provide appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

Additionally, there are resources such as the CDC's [website on reproductive health](#), the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline](#) and [Postpartum Support International](#). These offer information, support networks and helplines that can provide assistance. Remember, help is available, and no one should face PPD alone.

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