

NC Women's Hospital
Perinatal Mood Disorders

What are perinatal mood disorders?

Depression or anxiety that occurs during pregnancy or after childbirth is called a perinatal mood disorder. A mood disorder is a medical illness that can be effectively treated if you seek medical help.

Pregnancy and caring for a new baby can be one of the most joyful and exciting times in a woman's life, but it is also hard work. It is natural for a woman to experience changes in her feelings and mood during pregnancy and after giving birth. This is often referred to as "Baby Blues". However, if unpleasant feelings do not go away after 2 weeks, or if they get worse, they could be signs of Postpartum Depression or Postpartum Anxiety.

What are the symptoms?

You may experience several of the following symptoms, either during pregnancy or after childbirth:

- Feeling sad
- Crying a lot
- Anxiety
- Worrying about things more than usual
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Lack of energy
- Not interested in things you used to enjoy
- Not interested in your baby
- Scary thoughts about the baby or other family members
- Fear of hurting your baby or yourself
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Withdrawing from people

It is important to seek help if symptoms last longer than 2 weeks, or if symptoms are severe or worrisome.

Another type of perinatal mood disorder is postpartum psychosis. It is a serious illness that can be severe and life threatening. Women with bipolar disorder are at high risk for having severe postpartum depression or postpartum psychosis. Symptoms include:

- Delusions (thoughts that are not based in reality)
- Hallucinations (hearing or seeing things that aren't there)
- Disorganized thinking

How common are perinatal mood disorders?

Perinatal mood disorders occur in up to 10-15% of births. It can happen after any birth, not just after the birth of the first child especially if your birth experience was difficult or if the pregnancy ended with a loss. The symptoms might not be present at first and can occur up to and beyond twelve months after the birth. Perinatal mood disorders can be very difficult to recognize because this is a time when moms are supposed to be happy and are afraid to talk about it if they are not happy.

What causes perinatal mood disorders?

Experts do not know what causes mood disorders during pregnancy or postpartum. Research suggests that it is triggered by changes in hormones and that some women are more sensitive to those changes.

Stress, lack of social support, and a history of depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder may also contribute. Recent studies indicate that some perinatal mood disorders often run in families.

How are perinatal mood disorders treated?

Help is available for women with mood disorders during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Current treatments include psychotherapy, support therapy (talk therapy), non-pharmaceutical treatments (treatments that don't require medication) such as protected sleep (uninterrupted sleep), exercise, and good nutrition as well as antidepressants, or a combination of these methods.

What services does UNC offer for perinatal mood disorders?

Services include the UNC Perinatal Mood Disorder Clinic as well as the Perinatal Mood Disorders Inpatient Unit. Trained perinatal psychiatric providers along with doctors, nurses, midwives, counselors and social workers in the community will help you create the best plan to manage your symptoms and get you on the road to a healthier pregnancy and a happier time with your new baby.

Our inpatient unit provides comprehensive assessment and treatment, including medication stabilization and individual and group counseling. Comfort measures in the unit include:

- Protected sleep times
- Dedicated semiprivate rooms
- Glider chairs for pumping/nursing in patient rooms
- Dedicated group room
- Pumps, supplies and refrigerator for milk storage
- Nursing staff trained in postpartum and antepartum care
- Extended visiting hours to maximize positive mother-baby interaction
- Group therapies including art, relaxation, spiritual, biofeedback, exercise, behavioral, and psycho-education for both patients and spouses

UNC is now offering a Postpartum Support Group free of charge two nights a month. For details, please call (919) 966-3115 or email: christena_raines@med.unc.edu

UNC also offers an educational group called "Moms and Emotions" at the UNC Women's Health Information Center (WHIC). For details, please call (919) 843-1759.

For general information about our services, or to schedule an appointment, please call us at (919) 966-9640. You can also visit our website at www.womensmooddisorders.org

For crisis or emergency situations, please call UNC Crisis Psychiatry at (919) 966-2166.

Resources:

- NC Family Health Resource (800) 367-2229 www.nchealthystart.org
- Postpartum Support International (800) 944-4PPD www.postpartum.net
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (800) 762-2264 www.acog.com
- National Women's Health Information Center (800) 944-WOMAN www.4woman.gov
- Depression After Delivery www.depressionafterdelivery.com
- Moms Supporting Moms Raleigh Support Group (919) 454-6946 www.momssupportingmoms.net
- Mother to Mother Postpartum Depression *network* www.postpartumdepression.net
- Postpartum Progress, Rated #1 postpartum blog in the nation <http://postpartumprogress.typepad.com>
- Postpartum Depression Online Support Group for Dads www.postpartumdads.org
- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond/depression