

## ***North Carolina Women's Hospital***

# **Mood Changes After Giving Birth**

Many mothers notice they are more moody during pregnancy and after the birth of a baby. Pregnancy, labor and taking care of a new baby are all hard work. It is common to feel happy and excited one minute and then feel worried, sad or overwhelmed the next.

Almost 80% of all new mothers experience what is called the “baby blues” at some point during the first few weeks after their baby is born. Symptoms of the baby blues include crying more easily and more often than usual. You may feel that you have no energy, even to eat or take care of your baby. You may have trouble sleeping. It may be hard to make decisions. You may feel very anxious or worried, especially about caring for your new baby.

Usually these feelings go away after a few days, but if you continue to feel depressed or anxious, or if the feelings get worse, you may be suffering from postpartum mood disorder. This is an illness, just like heart disease. It changes the way you act and feel and can happen at anytime during the first year after the birth of your baby. It is important that you talk with someone about your feelings and symptoms. They won't just go away on their own, but they can be treated.

*Some things that may help you to feel your best include:*

- Try to get extra sleep by resting when your baby naps.
- Ask for help with household chores and baby care when you can.
- Talk to your husband or partner, family and friends about how you are feeling.
- Get dressed every day and leave the house, even if it's just to run an errand or take a walk.
- Spend some time with other people every day.
- Talk with other mothers about their experiences.
- Join a new mother support group.

There is no *one* thing that will increase your chances of having mood or anxiety problems but women who have had depression in the past, whose babies have health problems, or who do not have the support they need from friends or family have a higher risk of postpartum mood disorders. The rapid change in hormones after delivery may also contribute to these problems.

Postpartum mood disorders can start with little warning. They can affect any woman, even if she has the support of family and friends, help at home, a healthy newborn, and no history of depression. Experiencing these symptoms and feelings can make a woman feel guilty and sad during a time when she expects to be happy. If this happens to you, remember that none of it is your fault and you can get help.

### **Common symptoms of postpartum mood disorders:**

- Feeling restless or irritable
- Feeling sad or depressed, and/or crying a lot or feeling worthless or guilty

- Strong feelings of anxiety, tension, and/or fear that may include fast breathing, fast heart rate, hot or cold flashes, chest pain, shaking, or dizziness
- Having little energy and having trouble getting things done, remembering things, or making decisions
- Having headaches
- Having problems sleeping, such as not being able to sleep, feeling very tired, or sleeping much more than usual
- Losing your appetite or eating all the time
- Not enjoying your usual activities
- Not having any interest in sex after several weeks
- Feeling like you don't have enough interest in your baby or that you are worrying too much about your baby
- Checking on your baby over and over to see, for example, if the baby is still breathing

If you have any of these symptoms for more than a few days, you may have a postpartum mood disorder. Call a health care provider or mental health care provider or clinic to talk about your concerns. Women can experience any one of these or a combination of several. The symptoms usually start within three months after giving birth, but can happen at any time during the first year.

There is also a very rare condition known as postpartum psychosis. If you are fearful of hurting your baby or yourself, are hearing voices or don't feel that you are in touch with the real world:

- call 911 to get immediate help
- call someone to come to be with you right away
- contact your care provider or clinic at once

If you have a postpartum mood disorder, there is no reason to hide it or to suffer alone. Support, counseling and/or medicines can help. Many of these medicines have been found safe to take during pregnancy and during breastfeeding.

#### **Where to get help:**

**UNC Women's Mental Health Clinic for Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders at (919) 966-5217;** you can ask your health care provider to refer you or call to schedule an appointment yourself.

**North Carolina Family Health Resource Line at 1-800-367-2229;** the resource line can help you find services in your community.

**Depression after Delivery National Hotline at 1-800-944-4773;** this resource can help you find other local resources.