

Let's Talk: Postpartum depression

Presenter – Erica Hanlon, Clinical Counselor

Hi everybody. You know, after you have a baby, it can be a wonderful, exciting time. But many women feel stressed, anxious, and sad. My name is Erica. Let's talk about postpartum depression, a problem experienced by one in seven women.

Myth: Women with postpartum depression are at risk for hurting their children

So there are a lot of myths around postpartum depression. In fact, one of those myths is that women with postpartum depression are at risk for hurting their children. This isn't necessarily true. In fact, most women with postpartum depression are much more likely to hurt themselves. Now there are women who experience postpartum psychosis, which is a little bit different, and those women are more likely to hurt themselves and their children. Now what postpartum depression can do is interfere with a mother's ability to bond with her baby. But that doesn't necessarily mean that she doesn't love her baby.

Myth: Postpartum depression looks the same in everyone

Another myth about postpartum depression is that women who have it cry all the time and that they can't take care of themselves or their children. Now first of all, just like regular depression, postpartum depression can look different in anybody. So some women might cry a lot, others might be agitated or irritable, others aren't able to enjoy the experience of being a new mother, others feel tired and tearful all the time. So again, it can look different for everybody. And some women who have postpartum depression are really busy, running around, taking care of everybody. They can look okay on the outside, when really they're experiencing pain on the inside and suffering silently, and feeling like they can't enjoy motherhood, or bond with their child. So it's important that they seek help to be able to address those things.

Myth: Postpartum depression will go away on its own

Another myth is that postpartum depression will simply go away on its own. And for a lot of us, that would make us feel more comfortable, right? In fact, our societal view is that you sort of bootstrap it. You should take care of your own emotional well-being. But postpartum depression is a serious illness, and it needs expert help. And when you don't seek help, not only could it turn into major depression, but it means you're simply suffering longer than you need to. So when you seek expert

help, you might end up receiving counseling, medication, or a combination of both. And outcomes for women who seek professional help are pretty good. Postpartum depression can be effectively treated. So if you're a new mom, you might feel like you can't seek help. And you can. And if you know a new mom, and you suspect that she might be experiencing postpartum depression, encourage her to seek professional help.

Myth: Postpartum depression happens right after birth

So lots of people think that postpartum depression happens right after you give birth. This isn't necessarily true. In fact, postpartum depression can show up any time within the first year after giving birth. And symptoms typically show up about three to four months, for many women, after they give birth. Now this is different from baby blues, which you may have heard of. And baby blues often happens about two to three days after you give birth, and it only lasts a couple of weeks and then often clears up on its own. And it's less severe than postpartum depression. So postpartum depression can show up, again, any time during that first year. And you want to try and catch it early, so symptoms don't worsen over time.

Myth: Postpartum depression is the mother's fault

So many women actually blame themselves if they experience postpartum depression. They feel like they should be living up to some ideal of motherhood, and experiencing all the joy of it. And so they often feel guilty for experiencing postpartum depression. But postpartum depression is caused by lots of different factors, none of which are within a woman's control. There are a lot of fluctuations in hormones after a woman gives birth. And some women are simply more vulnerable to those changes in estrogen and progesterone, or they might be other things going on for women. They may lack social supports, they may have had a really stressful pregnancy, they might have a genetic predisposition for depression, or they may have a history of abuse and trauma. It's different for everybody, and it's nobody's fault.

Seek help for postpartum depression

So in conclusion, remember, postpartum depression is a real illness, and it needs expert help in order to be treated. Dismissing it like it's no big deal, or it'll just clear up on its own, can negatively impact the mother and the child. But with the right treatment with experts, there is hope. Postpartum depression can get better.

Source: [What is postpartum depression and anxiety?](#) American Psychological Association. Accessed March 2019.

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