



## Perinatal Mental Health: What do women and their families need to know?

---

- Up to 20% of all pregnant and postpartum women experience depression or anxiety during pregnancy, postpartum, or post-loss. Up to 10% of new fathers get depressed in the first year. If you feel down, angry, confused, or anxious – start talking about it as soon as you can. The sooner you reach out for support, the sooner you will feel better. Even though perinatal depression is common, people hesitate to talk about it and many women feel embarrassed and afraid they are alone. It might be hard at first, but your greatest achievement might be learning to reach out and ask for help.
- If you feel depressed, anxious, or overwhelmed, remember that there are resources and support that will help you recover, no matter how bad you might feel at first. Ask your prenatal provider for resources so that you will have a list if you need it. Contact Postpartum Support International at [www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net) or 1.800.944.4773 for support and resources near you.
- There are different kinds of perinatal mood reactions. You might have some of these symptoms: sadness, anxiety, exhaustion, numbness, anger, physical symptoms, confusion, insomnia, or disturbing thoughts or fears. You might have only anxiety, only depression, or a mix of symptoms. None of us expects to have them, but none of us needs to be unprepared for them.
- Every pregnant or new mom needs to rest, eat well, get emotional support, and take breaks. Cultures that support new mothers, allowing them rest and recuperation, have less postpartum depression. Traditional cultures provide the support of the village for new parents, but modern culture tends to encourage isolation and self-reliance. This makes it hard for new parents to take care of themselves. You will recover better if you get both practical and emotional support. Find people to talk to, and people who can give practical support, and let them help. Get extra support, especially if you find you have a hard time coping with your moods or the baby. Getting breaks from baby care is not a luxury – it is a necessity for all mothers.
- There are many options for treatment: medication, diet and exercise, counseling, support groups, or spiritual practice and support. If you are having a serious mood, anxiety, or thinking disorder, you need immediate treatment with an informed provider. Remember that your family can thrive if you feel better, and that support and treatment will help you find your way.
- Find what works best for you, make a plan of care, and stick to it. Learn about coping strategies for mood disorders and anxiety, and reach out until you find the help you need. Make calls, read what feels helpful, talk to women who have recovered. Pace yourself as you gather information. If you feel overloaded, take a break from too much advice, but not from support.
- Risk factors include previous moodiness before periods, reaction to birth control pills, stress and isolation, and a personal or family history of depression, anxiety, manic-depressive illness or PPD. It is not a failure to be depressed or anxious. Ease up on your expectations of yourself. Moms and Dads with depression often hinder their recovery because they feel guilty and then over-do it, neglecting their own needs. Find your own way to take care of yourself as a mother, and learn to honor it.
- Having perinatal depression or anxiety does not mean that you are failing as a mother or father, or that you will always feel depressed. It means that you can recover from a challenging condition that will teach you a great deal about yourself, the strength of women, and the power of reaching out.