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# The Baby Blues and Postpartum Depression: Information for Parents

There are few things more troubling to a new mother than having feelings of sadness, excessive worry, and irritability after the birth of a baby. These disturbing feelings can be frightening, leading you to believe you are not a good mother. The truth is that the hormonal and chemical changes that occur during and after pregnancy cause many women to feel these emotions.

Following the delivery of a baby, hormones that were very high in order to maintain the pregnancy, come crashing down. Often called the “baby blues,” these emotional changes usually start within the first 5 days after birth and are gone by 2 weeks. Unfortunately, for some mothers these emotions last longer than 2 weeks and may be associated with one of the most common complications of childbirth: postpartum depression.

Risk factors for postpartum depression include having a history of depression before or during the pregnancy, birth complications or a difficult labor, an infant with health problems, stressful events in the past year, relationship problems, financial difficulties, and breastfeeding problems. If feelings of sadness, anxiety, confusion, loss of enjoyment in life and difficulty sleeping or eating persist beyond 2 weeks postpartum, you should contact your healthcare provider and reach out to people in your support system for help treating the depression.

Research shows that treating postpartum depression with medication alone is not as successful as a multifocused treatment approach. A multifocused approach may include counseling (individual and/or group therapy), medication, rest, exercise, good nutrition, and the removal of additional stressors such as housekeeping, cooking, and child care. Following an evaluation by a therapist, you may be prescribed an antidepressant medication. If breastfeeding, the mother should ask her healthcare provider to prescribe a medication that will work with breastfeeding. If a treatment strategy is not working after about 3 weeks, you may want to consider a different approach.

There is no way to predict when the symptoms of depression will go away. What we do know is that the sooner treatment begins, the sooner the symptoms seem to resolve. Treatment for postpartum depression has an excellent recovery rate. You should remember there is hope and until then, surround yourself with people who support you while making the journey back to enjoying life again.