

New Parents and Depression

It is difficult for anyone to talk about depression or feeling sad, however it can be particularly difficult for new parents.

Estimates on the rate of depression range from 10% to over 30% while researchers agree that the incidence of depression is more common among women than among men. It makes sense that new parents and in particular new moms are under more stress than they have ever experienced. Biological, life cycle, hormonal and psychosocial factors unique to women may all be linked to higher rates of depression. We know that hormones directly affect brain chemistry that controls emotions and mood. It makes intuitive sense that women would be particularly vulnerable to depression or mood disorders after giving birth, when hormonal and physical changes, along with the new responsibility of caring for a newborn, can be overwhelming. It is sometimes called the "baby blues," to describe a brief episode of feeling lost, emotional and emotionally exhausted. We also know that some mothers will develop other or more persistent post-partum mood disorders. Evidence on the incidence of paternal depression is not known. It is important that every parent or family member be aware of the signs and symptoms of post-partum mood disorders and when to seek treatment and emotional support for the new parent.

It is normal for a new parent to experience a range of emotions and moods. In fact some estimate that 40% of women report feelings of sadness and experience uncontrollable crying. For some, getting unconditional support and an adequate amount of rest will help to alleviate their situation. For other mothers, the situation can worsen to the point where they are feeling signs of clinical depression. Typical signs include:

- Loss of a sense of pleasure or interest in activities
- Persistent feelings of self doubt
- Feelings of guilt and hopelessness

Other common symptoms such as difficulties with memory, fatigue, changes in appetite, or insomnia are pretty much expected if you are a new parent. What is important is to make sure that people around you know how you are feeling and that you do not filter or judge yourself. Depression is viewed by some as a normal response to extraordinary circumstances. So parents have to be kind to themselves and recognize that their usual strategies for coping and routines may not work as well as they once did.

What do you do if you are experiencing a post-partum mood disorder, and where do you go to get help?

- First, accept that as a new parent is normal to feel overwhelmed and exhausted
- Let people know you need help.
- Ask your partner (friends, family members) for assistance and be as specific as you possibly can.
- Don't feel guilty asking for help. Most people love to help particularly with new babies
- Most adults accept that we all need help some time, that if you are asking you need it and if they volunteer they are doing so willingly
- Make an appointment to see your physician or make time at a clinic. Most parents make sure that baby's needs are met but may forget to ask the doctor for a check over themselves.
- Do not isolate yourself. Stay in contact with friends or family. If you do not know anyone in town then start by visiting our website at www.fsca.ca or call us at 403-343-6400 to ask where you can go to meet other new mums and dads. You are not alone and your feelings are shared by other parents.

- Call the Health Link line at 1-866-408-5465 and ask where you can find a local health professional.
- Consider attending a group for new moms who also may be experiencing challenges in the post-partum period. An 8 week program called Mindful Connections is available for moms of babies 3 weeks-14 months of age at FSCA. Call 403-343-6400 for more information on this group program.
- Two sources that can be helpful are Canadian Mental Health at www.cmha.ab.ca and the National Institute of Mental Health at www.nimh.nih.gov/

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