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the moms our children need, the women we want to be

Postpartum Depression

Many women experience "the blues" in the days or weeks following the birth of a baby. In most cases this period of mild depression passes naturally within a couple of weeks, with no lasting harm to mother or baby. But for some mothers this natural period of transition becomes a more serious, longer-lasting depression that requires extra support or professional help. How do you tell what's normal? What are the red flags that signal a more serious depression? How might this affect a baby's well-being? And what can be done to make a difference?

I. Underlying issues: Why it's so important to talk about this
- Romanticized expectations of motherly bliss, so moms feel ashamed
- Stigma about mental health issues in general; some mothers are afraid of being labeled "mentally ill" and may even fear that others will think they shouldn't be allowed to keep their children
- Depression is treatable; even emotional support and/or short-term counseling can be very effective if the problem is identified early

II. Recognizing types of postpartum depression
- "Baby blues" (occurs in 50-75% of women)
  Sadness, crying spells, anxiety irritability, insomnia
  Lasts for several days to two weeks – usually no lasting effects on mother or baby

- Postpartum depression (10-20% of women)
  Same symptoms but longer and more severe
  Also guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, urge to run away, aversion to baby
  Major clinical depression; usually requires professional help; babies can become flat in affect, not develop the sense of security they need, have lasting social-emotional difficulties if mom doesn't get help

- Postpartum psychosis (1-3 of 1000 women)
  Disorientation, hallucinations, suicidal thoughts/actions, persistent thoughts of harming baby
  Immediate psychiatric help to protect mother and child!

III. Supportive steps friends and family members can take
- Challenge the stigma
- Offer concrete help
- Listen
- Encourage activity
- Support getting professional help

Marti Erickson, Ph.D.
Owner & Co-host, Mom Enough®
www.momenough.com
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