

Healthy Roots Pediatrics
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Dear Parent:

Children live in families. Therefore, anything that affects a family member can (and usually does) affect a child. This is especially true during infancy. As self-evident as this may seem, it explains why we as pediatric providers are vitally concerned with you as a parent.

There are many myths about having a baby and parenthood. One is that the infant's first year is "the happiest time" of a mother's life. Not always. Almost every mom goes through the "Baby Blues" (due to rapid hormonal changes) and approximately one in five experience postpartum depression and/or anxiety that may have long lasting effects on infants, mothers and families if not addressed. The good news is that postpartum depression/anxiety is easily and successfully treated—but only if we identify it.

Given that 85% of the time postpartum depression/anxiety develops within the first six months after delivery, we ask all of our mothers of children under six months of age to fill out a standardized screening questionnaire. Routinely, we introduce the procedure at the one-month well-baby visit. Then at future well visits between one and six months of age we will again ask you to complete the brief questionnaire, allowing us to continue to follow you and your baby. If you have any questions or concerns we will be happy to discuss them at any visit. Likewise, if we develop concerns after reviewing your responses, we will bring them up. Your feelings are important to us.

Please know that postpartum depression/anxiety is common and responsive to treatment. Immediate intervention can prevent serious impact on your child and allow you to fully enjoy your new family.

Sincerely,

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LISTED BELOW ARE POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS OF POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION/ANXIETY:

Sometimes life after a baby is not what we expect...

What if they knew what I was thinking?

Why am I still crying?

How do I manage everything?

I'm so tired, how do I ask for help?

Will I ever be interested in sex again?

What if I don't have enough milk and I have to stop nursing?

I'm afraid I will harm myself. I'm afraid I will harm my baby.

Pregnancy and childbirth can be wonderful and welcome events in a woman's life. However, any change brings a certain amount of stress. There are increasing demands upon a woman's body and time as she progresses through pregnancy and delivery and as she begins to care for her new infant. Many women feel overwhelmed, anxious, and uncertain about how they will juggle home, work, and their relationships when the new baby arrives.

Within the first weeks after delivery, most women experience what are called "mood swings." They may feel happy one minute and sad the next. They may feel mildly depressed, lack concentration, and find that they cannot sleep well even when the baby is asleep. As many as eight out of ten new mothers experience several, if not all, of these symptoms. If you experience these symptoms you have what is called the "Baby Blues." The blues are a normal part of early motherhood and are usually resolved by about ten days to three weeks after delivery. Although the blues are extremely common, some women will experience more severe or prolonged symptoms of depression or intense anxiety which make it difficult to enjoy their new baby or life in general.

Postpartum depression/anxiety is a more serious condition that may be initiated by the rapid hormonal changes occurring with pregnancy and delivery and during the postpartum months. It affects approximately one in five women within six months of the birth of their child. Women often begin to question themselves and their ability to mother their new baby. They worry that they are not delighting in the baby as much as they would like, and begin to feel inadequate in various ways. Depression (and/or severe anxiety) affects the mother's mood state, her ability to function day to day, and her ability to enjoy and care for the new infant. It has a serious impact on the psychological, social, and even cognitive development of the child because a depressed or highly anxious mother is unable to parent as well as she otherwise would. There is also a significant impact on the rest of the family. Fortunately, postpartum depression/anxiety almost always responds rapidly and well to treatment.

- ❖ Loss of interest or pleasure in life
- ❖ Loss of appetite
- ❖ Decreased energy and motivation
- ❖ Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- ❖ Early morning awakening
- ❖ Sleeping more than usual
- ❖ Increased crying or tearfulness
- ❖ Feeling worthless, hopeless, or overly guilty
- ❖ Heightened anxiety or worry, panic attacks
- ❖ Restlessness or irritability
- ❖ Unexplained weight gain or rapid weight loss
- ❖ Obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior
- ❖ Thoughts of death
- ❖ Worries about harming the baby

Much less frequently, women may not only develop symptoms of depression or anxiety but may also begin to think and act in ways that are totally uncharacteristic for them. They may have unusual thoughts including that others are planning to harm them, that their thoughts do not belong to them, or that their baby is evil.

If you have or develop any of these symptoms, it is important to remember that this is not something you brought upon yourself and it does not reflect a personal weakness or an inability to cope. Support groups, individual therapy, and medication are available to help you begin to feel like yourself again. We can help you to find the right treatment.

If you have any questions or concerns or would like more information, please call our office, or the office of your obstetrician or internal medicine doctor.