

While we often think of bringing a child into the world as a time of joy and celebration, it is also a time of transition, stress and exhaustion. This month, we're focusing on how postpartum depression can affect families and what people experiencing it and their families can do to get help and support.

What is Postpartum Depression (PPD)?

Postpartum Depression (PPD) is a common type of depression occurring after the birth of a baby. The depression is linked to many different changes associated with childbirth, including chemical, social and psychological changes. Many new parents experience the "baby blues," or sadness that may stem from stress and exhaustion around a new baby, but parents with the "blues" can still function on a daily basis and create bonds with their child. PPD is more severe, affecting 1 in 7 women; it can limit a parent's ability to perform daily activities or responsibilities, and it often leads to a sense of disconnection from the new baby.

PPD can affect men as well as women; in fact 1 in 10 men experiences Paternal Postpartum depression (PPPD).

Although they do not experience labor, men's bodies and minds still react to the huge transitions of parenthood. Men might not seek treatment for many reasons, including the stigma around men having mental health issues as well as the lack of awareness that PPPD even exists. Some symptoms of PPD and PPPD include:

- difficulty thinking
- difficulty sleeping
- unusual weight loss or gain
- anxiousness or upsetting thoughts
- irritability
- feeling disconnected from your baby and, at its worst, thoughts of hurting oneself or one's baby

If these symptoms are occurring intensely enough to impact a parent's ability to function or their relationship with their child, then the parent may be experiencing a form of PPD.

Fighting the Stigma around PPD

In our culture, we often focus on the joys and wonder of

childbirth. A new parent is expected to be happy and to 'enjoy every moment.' However, that focus can lead to stigma for new parents who, due to PPD, don't feel happy. They may feel shame that they "should" be happy and are not; they may feel disappointed that they are not meeting the expectations of their family and friends. The most important thing to remember is that PPD and PPPD are common—the disorder is not caused by anything a parent may have done or by who they are as a person.

Resources in the Community

Especially after having a baby, it's important to recognize that we all need help sometimes—it's ok to ask for help when you need it! Friends and family members can be a integral support system for new parents, and partners or spouses are often the first to recognize when someone is experiencing PPD (even before that person sees it themselves).

If someone you love is experiencing PPD or PPPD, let them know you are there as a support. Ask them regularly how they feel, and remind them that PPD is very common for new parents regardless of gender. Do what you can to lighten their load, and help them connect to important resources in the community, including:

- **EAP:** If you or someone you love is experiencing symptoms of PPD, call EAP to speak with a master's level clinician about resources in the community or to schedule an appointment.
- **Primary care providers:** they can prescribe antidepressants and/or refer to a mental health provider.
- **Postpartum Support International:** check out <https://www.postpartum.net/> to find local support groups and contact information for a local coordinator who will register you for a group for no cost. In the Buffalo area, contact Nancy Owen at 716-568-3682 to register.
- **Schools, daycare providers, or churches:** some of these organizations facilitate parent support groups. Ask a teacher or religious leader if this resource is available.

