

Postpartum Depression is one of the *most common medical complications during and after pregnancy.*

Postpartum depression, or PPD, is a serious depressive disorder that can impair a mother's overall function, including the ability to fulfill personal responsibilities and engage in daily activities. In the US, about 1 in 8 moms reports experiencing symptoms of PPD.

PPD can have serious consequences for not just the mother. It can also negatively affect their partners and her infant's physical, mental, and emotional development.

The exact cause of PPD is unknown, however, hormonal fluctuations and several potential risk factors, including a stressful life event or a history of depression, may increase the chance of developing PPD.

The symptoms of PPD vary. While expert opinions differ on the timing of onset, symptoms of PPD can occur during pregnancy or after delivery up to 1 year postpartum. Common signs and symptoms of PPD may include:

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Irritability
- Trouble bonding or forming an emotional attachment with the new baby
- Persistent doubts about the ability to care for the new baby
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, hopelessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Fatigue or abnormal decrease in energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping (even when the baby is sleeping), awakening early in the morning, or oversleeping
- Abnormal appetite, weight changes or both
- Thoughts about death, suicide, or harming oneself or the baby
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not have a clear physical cause or that do not ease even with treatment

During pregnancy, women receive medical care from many different healthcare providers, including family physicians, obstetrician-gynecologists, midwives, other specialists, and mid-nurses.

Even with all these healthcare provider visits, it is estimated that approximately 50% of PPD cases may go undiagnosed. While feelings of reluctance, shame, fear, embarrassment, or guilt may prevent new mothers or their partners from seeking help, PPD is not a personal failure or a reflection of a woman's ability to be a good mom.

Leading medical organizations in the US recommend screening for PPD at least once during the postpartum period. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that moms should be screened during baby wellness visits through 6 months postpartum. Implementation of routine PPD screening policies can lead to improved screening rates, connection to care, and reduced duration or severity of the depressive symptoms.

This document is also available in Spanish.