

# Coping with Postpartum Anxiety and Depression

## Objective

To identify ways to manage postpartum anxiety and depression.

## You Should Know

Becoming a new parent is one of the most difficult challenges people ever face. These are some typical questions new parents say to themselves:

- Will my baby sleep okay? Will I be able to get enough sleep?
- Is my baby eating enough?
- What does that cry mean? Is my baby crying too much?
- Is my baby too hot? Too cold?
- Should we let people visit?
- What should I do when I go back to work?

It is natural for new parents to worry, have doubts, or second-guess themselves. But how can you distinguish new parent nervousness from postpartum anxiety or depression?

It is important to recognize when you are struggling with something more serious than new-parent nerves. Sleep deprivation, stress, relationship changes, hormonal shifts, and health issues are all factors that can contribute to postpartum anxiety or depression. The sooner you recognize there might be a problem and get help, the sooner you can start to feel better.

Postpartum anxiety is obsessive worry and fear associated with having a baby and becoming a parent. You might have panic attacks, racing thoughts, difficulty sleeping, and feelings of dread. You might lose sleep because you are worried your baby is not breathing. Constant fear can be exhausting and all-consuming.

Postpartum depression, more serious than the “baby blues,” is usually accompanied by mood swings, difficulty bonding with your baby, fatigue, irritability, overwhelm, feelings of worthlessness, and thoughts of death or suicide. It is actually more common than you might think, as 1 in 7 women develop postpartum depression during the first year of their baby’s life. Risk factors include relationship problems, excessive stress, a weak support system, or financial problems.

You might not realize you are experiencing postpartum anxiety or depression. If people close to you ones express worry, seek help. If you are struggling with postpartum anxiety or depression, there are things you can do. Here are some tips:

**1. Get active and go outside.** One of the best ways to cope is by exercising – outside, if possible. Prioritize spending time in nature, going for walks, hiking, or whatever feels good. Getting just 10-15 minutes of sunshine each day can help you feel better.

- 2. Set aside time for yourself to relax and take a break.** Find small ways to pamper yourself, like taking a bath, savoring a cup of tea, or getting a massage.
- 3. Spend quality time with others.** You might feel alone and isolated. Engage in conversations with friends and family members – even if you do not feel up to talking. Set aside time to connect with others or socialize.
- 4. Do smaller tasks.** If you are home with your baby and feel like you need to do something, avoid tackling big tasks like cleaning the entire house. Instead, focus on smaller tasks like clearing off the kitchen counter or vacuuming the living room. You will feel more accomplished starting and finishing one small task at a time.
- 5. Ask for help.** It can be hard to show vulnerability, especially to those closest to you. But asking for help from loved ones might be just what you need. For example, if you feel upset or overwhelmed, ask your partner to sit with you and practice mindful meditation.
- 6. Join a group.** You might have a supportive partner and friends, but you might consider seeking out other new moms. It can be reassuring to hear others share your worries, insecurities, and feelings. Check out local support groups for new parents or organizations such as Mommy and Me. There are online support groups, such as <https://www.postpartum.net> or <https://www.postpartumdepression.org/support/groups>
- 7. Carve out couple's time.** Did you know more than 50% of all divorces take place after the birth of a child? Your partner might be your primary source of emotional support and social connection. But the demands and needs of a new baby can get in the way of maintaining a healthy relationship – unless you put time, energy, and thought into preserving the bond. It is essential to make time for just the two of you. Even spending 15 or 20 minutes together—focused on each other—can make a big difference.
- 8. Seek out the help of a therapist or counselor.** Seeking help from a mental health professional is not admitting you are a failure as a parent. You might need psychotherapy or even medication for a short time – no one is going to think you do not love your child.

This worksheet will help you identify ways to manage your postpartum anxiety or depression.

## What to Do

What are some signs you might be suffering from postpartum depression or anxiety? Be specific.

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Who can you talk to about how you are feeling? Write down three or four supportive people you can trust.

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Review the list of things you can do to feel better. Write down what you are willing to try:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Now, over the next two weeks, use the chart to write down how you are feeling and the activities you do each day to feel better.

Date	How did you feel?	Who did you talk to?	What did you do to feel better?

## Reflections on This Exercise

After completing this exercise, did you find your anxiety or depression decreased? Why or why not?

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Which action or activity helped you the most? Explain.

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What else can you do to address your postpartum depression or anxiety?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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