



Maternal Depression

What is maternal depression?



If you are the mother of an infant or toddler and have been feeling sad, hopeless or overwhelmed for awhile, you may have maternal depression.

When a baby is first born, moms often feel tired and stressed, plus their hormones are changing. This can result in the “baby blues,” a very common feeling. But if this feeling sticks with a mom for more than two or three weeks, it may be depression.

A mother’s depression can affect every member of a family. It is hard for a

depressed mom to do many of the things a child needs — even basic tasks like preparing meals and playing with the child. It is harder for a depressed mom to respond to the needs of the child, and the child can suffer as a result. Depression can also affect the child’s ability to bond with the mother.

Symptoms of maternal depression can include a lack of energy, decreased hunger, lack of interest in parenting, difficulty sleeping, negative feelings toward the baby, feelings of guilt, and a loss of interest

in favorite activities.

Diagnosis of maternal depression involves answering some questions at your doctor’s office, and talking about how you’re feeling. Your doctor can then rate your answers to find out what level of depression you may be experiencing.

Treatment of maternal depression can include a combination of medicine and counseling. It is often helpful to moms to just have someone they can talk to about their feelings. There are also several types of anti-depressant medicines that can be given to breastfeeding moms that can be helpful without harming the baby.

It can take six or more months before depression starts getting better.

If you have been having thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, you can get immediate help by calling 911, or visiting your local hospital.

Ways to help your child:

ONE

If you think you are depressed, get help right away. You can’t make depression go away by thinking positively, and over time your symptoms will only get worse. As you start to get better, parenting will feel easier.

TWO

Even if you are depressed, try to give your baby or toddler all the positive time and attention you can. You may not feel like it, but try to hold your child close, and try to interact several times each day.

Resources:

Call [Early Access](http://www.earlyaccess.org) at 1-888-IAKIDS1 if you have child development questions or concerns.

[HelpGuide.org](http://www.helpguide.org) helps identify the signs of postpartum depression, and offers moms ideas for coping, and links to online support.

The [University of Iowa Women’s Wellness and Counseling Service](http://www.uoi.edu) focuses on women’s mental health needs, with an emphasis on maternal mood and anxiety disorders.

[Mental Health America](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net) offers a factsheet on postpartum depression, links to support and treatment centers, and a toll-free hotline moms in crisis can call to get immediate help.

This factsheet is part of an informational series for parents of children ages 0-5, developed by the Iowa Department of Education Early Childhood Services Bureau. (Updated April 2010)

Three important facts about maternal depression:

1. Maternal depression is common. About 12 percent of mothers suffer from depression in a given year, and roughly 82 percent of new moms experience the “baby blues” after giving birth.

2. Maternal depression can affect a child’s healthy development. When a mom is depressed and not able to regularly respond to her child’s needs, healthy development and attachments may not

form. As a result of the mother’s depression, a child could experience developmental or behavioral delays, so it is important to treat depression right away.

3. There are many safe, effective treatments for depression. Medications that are safe for nursing infants and toddlers, plus counseling, can help a mom overcome her struggle with depression.

THREE

Take breaks from parenting. Sometimes you will need to just put your baby in a safe place — like a crib or a baby swing — and rest for a few minutes. Other times, you might hire a babysitter and get out of the house alone. Moms need time by themselves to recharge.

FOUR

Remember, you are not alone. Other mothers are also dealing with depression, and support groups exist. Find a trusted person to talk to and share your feelings.