

Appendix J: Depression and Anxiety after Birth Resource Sheet

Depression and Anxiety After Birth

A woman may have many different feelings after her baby is born. Some of these feelings are joy and excitement, or guilt and sadness. This is quite normal after such an important event! Sometimes unhappy feelings become so difficult that a mother feels overwhelmed and out of control. If this happens, a woman may be suffering from postpartum depression and anxiety.

What are Postpartum Depression and Anxiety?

They are emotional problems which may happen to a mother after her baby is born. One mother in five experiences depression and anxiety after birth. These problems are more common than many people think. Every mother is different and may have different symptoms. These symptoms may happen shortly after birth or many months later.

What are the Symptoms?

Most women feel:

- sad.
- angry.
- guilty.
- alone.
- worried.
- inadequate.
- irritable.

Other feelings are:

- wanting to run away.
- not being able to cope.
- exhaustion – not being able to sleep even when the baby sleeps.
- isolation.

A mother who is new to Canada may also feel:

- lonely because her family and friends are far away.
- unfamiliar with the Canadian healthcare system.
- the absence of familiar comforts, traditions and rituals.

These feelings last for two weeks or more, and do not go away by themselves. This is a different situation than the “baby blues” (fatigue and tearfulness). The “baby blues” may appear shortly after birth and disappear on their own.

A mother may have “scary” thoughts of harming the baby or herself. These thoughts may increase if the mother is overtired or stressed. A doctor should be consulted.



What Causes Postpartum Depression and Anxiety?

The causes are not completely understood. Some causes may be:

- hormonal and chemical changes in the body.
- stress and lack of support.
- adjusting to motherhood.

A history of emotional, physical or sexual abuse may be a factor.

Why Do So Many Women Suffer in Silence?

- they may hide their feelings.
- they may feel ashamed and guilty.
- health care professionals may not recognize the depression or anxiety.
- partners and families may not take the situation seriously.

What Can Help?

- speak to a healthcare provider, family member, friend or counsellor.
- ask for the location of a postpartum support program.
- make sure that the mother gets enough food and rest.
- understand that this is not the mother's fault.
- accept and understand that a new mother cannot do everything.
- ask for help from others.
- be willing to try things that may be unfamiliar such as counselling, group support, or medication.
- take one day at a time.

Remember: **There is help available.** **It won't last forever.**

If you have concerns or questions please call a nurse, your midwife, nurse practitioner, clinic or doctor.

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Source: Multicultural Perinatal Network. (2004). Toronto: Toronto Public Health.

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