

Coping with Postpartum Blues

Although severe, incapacitating postpartum depression is rare, it's estimated that up to 90% of new mothers get postpartum "blues", a collection of symptoms that include fatigue, sadness, irritability, a feeling of being overwhelmed, and a readiness to dissolve into tears, all coupled with guilt that you don't find motherhood total bliss. These perfectly *normal* feelings may be caused primarily by your physical condition following birth, when your body is drained by the delivery and strained by your wildly fluctuating hormone levels. In addition, caring for a newborn *is* exhausting.

But psychological factors are at work, too. You have no time for yourself and may feel housebound – and perhaps insecure about your baby care skills. And even though you're no longer pregnant, you probably haven't lost more than half the weight you gained. No wonder you feel a little low!

However, most postpartum blues disappear in a few days or a few weeks, as hormone levels get back to normal. Here's how to cope until then:

- **Get as much rest as possible.** Since you must wake up with your baby in the middle of the night, try to nap when your baby sleeps.
- **Don't surrender to the "superwoman syndrome".** Let the dishes or the ironing go while you rest. Pushing yourself will increase fatigue and may prolong the blues.
- **Accept help.** You may want to limit or stagger visits by friends so everyone won't show up at once. If anyone offers assistance, accept it. Let them cook and freeze a meal or even watch the baby while you relax. The baby's grandparents may be especially helpful in this regard.
- **Take time for yourself.** A nap, a walk, a soothing bath, time to read or watch television can do wonders for your psyche. Let friends pitch in or hire a babysitter, even if only for an hour.
- **Realize you won't like everything about baby care.** After the fifteenth diaper change of the day or the fifth wake-up call of the night, it's normal to feel a little frazzled.
- **Talk about your emotions.** Discussing how you feel with other women – and finding that they felt the same way - can be therapeutic. Try sharing your feelings and doubts with your husband or partner, too.

If you still experience as much anxiety and irritability after a few weeks as at the beginning, you should consult your physician. Don't let a prolonged case of postpartum blues go untreated.