

The transition to become a new parent can be a stressful experience for both mothers and fathers. Postpartum depression occurs in fewer new fathers than in mothers. The risk for fathers is higher when the mother is experiencing postpartum depression. When both parents follow the hints below, the impact of depression on the family can be reduced.

Develop a regular sleep routine. Pay attention to your needs for adequate rest and make rest a priority.

- Sleep or rest when the baby sleeps.
- Avoid drinking alcoholic or caffeine-containing beverages (tea, coffee, cola) in the evening. Caffeine is a stimulant and will keep you from sleeping.
- Going to bed hungry can keep you from falling asleep.
- If you don't fall asleep after a reasonable time, get up and do something mindless, such as reading, until you feel sleepy.

Eat well. If you don't feel like eating, have small, frequent nutritious snacks and sip on fluids throughout the day. If you feel sick to your stomach don't force yourself to eat, but try one or two bites every 1/2 - 1 hour when awake.

Try to do something physical. Take a short walk, and increase the time and effort as you feel stronger.

Pay attention to good feelings, however fleeting they may be.

- Notice and accept genuine feelings of contentment, joy, love and happiness. This is not the same as acting cheerful but when there are positive feelings, stop and pay attention to them.
- You may choose to write down good feelings, to remind yourself.

Recognize your negative emotions. "Bad" feelings may actually last longer if you do not allow yourself to feel them.

- Good parents may have bad thoughts.
- You may experience grief and sadness or a sense of loss.
- You may feel anger ranging from mild irritation, resentment or frustration to rage.
- You may have scary thoughts.
- If you are having panic attacks or have thoughts of suicide, it is important to share them and to seek help.

Give your emotions airtime.

- Cry if you want. Tears can be healing and relieve stress.
- Share disturbing thoughts with someone because thinking and talking about them is not the same as doing them. It is not uncommon to have thoughts of suicide, self harm or harm coming to your baby. Talk to your partner, a friend, a family member or call the Help Line at 1-877-303-2632.

Recognize that you may need help with the responsibilities of a new baby.

- Set realistic expectations for yourself. You don't have to be *perfect*.
- Actively explore who can help. What family members are available to help you?
- Let your partner, family, or friends help with the household chores, baby care, meals, etc. For example, "I can use your help cooking supper tonight." Work together as a team.
- Meet other parents; join a baby group or new parents group in your area.
- Breaks away from your baby may give you energy to be a better parent. Think about who or what organizations are available to provide you with a break.

With the assistance of your "helper", take time for at least one break a day from your parenting duties even if only for a few minutes.

- Sit down for a cup of tea
- Take a leisurely bath
- Have lunch with a friend
- Take a walk

Do good things for yourself.

- Set a time to do something you like to do, not something you should do
- Learn or resume some creative activity such as music or a craft
- Listen to music you enjoy
- Get a new haircut

Develop simple routines and create less stress for yourself.

- A routine helps you get things done in your day with the least amount of planning and concentration.
- When you feel overwhelmed, break tasks into smaller steps.

Set small goals for yourself. Plan one achievable task for each day. Planning to clean your entire house in a day is impossible and only adds to the frustration you may already be feeling.

Make plans but do not plan the results. Make plans but don't expect that your plans will always turn out as you imagined they would. If they don't - try to go with the change and use the time to your advantage anyway. For example: you may have arranged a babysitter so you could meet a friend for lunch. Your friend cancels and your plans change. Instead of being upset, use the time to go out by yourself.

Give yourself credit.

- Parenting is probably the greatest challenge that most people will ever have to meet.
- Parents make an immense contribution to society, but this is not always recognized.
- Give yourself credit for doing a good job in one of the most difficult jobs there is!

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

Alberta Health Link (24hours/day 7days/week) 1-866-408-5465
Mental Health Help Line (24hours/day 7days/week) 1-877-303-2642
Your local Community Health Centre during business hours
www.myhealth.alberta.ca

FOR URGENT HELP

Mental Health Help Line 1-877-303-2642
Nearest emergency department