Understanding and overcoming postpartum depression

Many women feel anxious and a little "down" after giving birth, and may experience bouts of unexplained emotion or crying. And it's estimated that as many as 45 per cent to 80 per cent of new mothers will experience a mild and short-term case of the "baby blues." This is a normal reaction to the combination of



ilities, and will ease of its own accord.

However, approximately 15 per cent of women experience Postpartum Depression (PPD), a clinical illness that frequently strikes three to nine months after childbirth and can last for as long as two or three years if left untreated. In very rare cases, postpartum depression can escalate to postpartum psychosis, which is characterized by homicidal and suicidal impulses, hallucinations, delusions and disorganized or bizarre thinking.

If you or a loved one is suffering from postpartum depression, it is important to seek immediate help. PPD is a common and very treatable illness and you are not alone—there are many support services available.

When PPD happens

Many women feel ashamed to admit that they're severely depressed at what they feel should be a joyous time in their lives. But PPD is a genuine illness and signifies no weakness on the part of the sufferer. Here are some tips to help you on the road to recovery:

- Symptoms most frequently begin between three to nine months after childbirth
- PPD may also suddenly occur when nursing stops
- It can appear after any pregnancy, including a miscarriage or abortion
- A genetic history of depression may make some women more vulnerable
- Internal stresses can contribute, including high expectations, undeveloped coping skills or personal outlook
- External stresses may play a part, including lack of social support, trauma and/or obstetrical complications

Symptoms may include:

- Continual exhaustion or insomnia
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Feelings of deep sadness
- Intense anger and irritability
- Loss of interest in sex
- Feeling overwhelmed, helpless and/or hopeless
- Anxiety or panic attacks may include frightening and repetitive thoughts about yourself or your baby
- Nightmares
- Difficulty concentrating and an inability to remember things
- Thoughts of suicide or causing harm to self or others, including the infant
- Extreme concerns about the baby's health and development

Seeking help

PPD is highly treatable. Talk to your doctor as soon as possible. Be honest about how you are feeling. Ask about available options. Medication may be recommended and/or support counselling. PPD support groups can provide emotional support from other women in similar circumstances, together with the skilled guidance of a trained facilitator. Individual counselling may also be an option.

It can often take a few tries to find the right treatment. If you experience no improvement after four to six weeks, return to your doctor for a re-evaluation.

Normal support networks of family and friends may not understand PPD. If family or friends are saying that you're just having a bad day, realize that their statements are unfounded—PPD is an illness and you should seek out knowledgeable support for your condition. Don't be discouraged if it takes a few tries to find the right system of support that works for you.