Postpartum Emotions

As you hold your baby, you will begin to build a relationship that will grow throughout life. Mothers and babies need time to get to know one another. By touching, holding, and talking to your baby, along with looking into his or her eyes, you will get to know one another quickly.

Adjusting to motherhood
It is natural to feel anxious in your new role as a mother. You will have less time for yourself. As your body heals, you will be learning how to take care of your baby, adjusting to life at home, or planning to return to work.

Many new mothers and families wonder if they are capable of caring for their new babies. You may miss the attention of pregnancy. You may worry about money, or career, or if you will ever get back in shape.

Your partner and the baby’s siblings are also adjusting to the new baby. Partners may miss sleep along with the time and energy they once had. Siblings may feel less important than they once were.

Here are some suggestions that may help make this transition a smooth one:
• Set time aside for your partner and family to relax and talk about the changes in your lives. You may want to make a date with your partner or friends.
• Let others know how you feel and what you need.
• Discuss questions and concerns (no matter how small) with your health care providers.

• Ask a friend or relative to help with childcare or housework.
• Take time to nap, exercise, or enjoy a favorite hobby.
• Nurse frequently, relax and enjoy this time with baby.
• Rest when the baby sleeps.
• Hold and talk to your baby often. Keep the baby warm, dry and fed. If baby is comfortable, you will be too.
• Involve your partner, family and friends in caring for baby.
• Take time for your other children and involve them in caring for baby.
• Eat healthy foods.
• Have realistic expectations for the new changes in your life.
• Get fresh air. It’s good for you and the baby.
• If you are lonely, tired or frustrated, take time out for yourself to help relieve stress.
• Ask for help if you are not sure what to do for yourself or your baby.

Understanding the Blues
The “baby blues” is a mild depression many women feel in the first few weeks after birth. One out of ten new mothers will feel this letdown after the emotionally charged experience of birth. Symptoms may appear quickly or come on gradually. The baby blues may last a few days or weeks but almost always go away within a fairly brief time.
You may have the baby blues if you:
- Cry often, at times without reason
- Feel tired without energy to get through the day
- Have trouble falling asleep
- Are confused or distracted
- Feel sad or hopeless
- Are irritable or angry, sometimes without reason
- Have a poor appetite, or cannot control your appetite

You may have good days mixed with bad days. Pay attention to your moods. Don’t try to take care of everything on your own. Talk with your family, friends, or health care provider; be sure to get the help you need.

**Postpartum depression**
While the baby blues are a normal part of the postpartum time, a more serious problem is postpartum depression. This is different from the baby blues in the following ways:
- Postpartum depression lasts beyond two to three weeks.
- It may start about the third week after birth, or even up to several months later.
- The depression may leave mom feeling very alone or completely overwhelmed. She may start to distance herself from her partner, family or friends.
- Symptoms are more varied and may include panic, exhaustion, feelings of inadequacy, fear of harming herself or the baby, lack of interest in the baby.

What causes the baby blues and postpartum depression?
The exact cause is not known. This is a time of great adjustment and increased physical and emotional demands on the new mother. Some studies point to the role of hormones in affecting women’s moods. It is important to know that these symptoms are not a sign of weakness. Help and treatment are available.

Reach out
Proper help is the first step toward feeling better. Share your feelings with someone you trust – your family, friends, health care provider, or a counselor.

If you have signs of continued blues or postpartum depression, or if your feelings begin to interfere with your life, call your health care provider or the birthing unit where you delivered.