

Are you struggling?

Becoming a mother is a transformational experience even for the most emotionally robust of women. Although society and the media often portray becoming a mother as a blissful event which brings the woman joy, fulfilment and feelings of intense love, the reality of being a mother rarely matches the fantasised ideal.

A new mother can feel very guilty if she is not feeling the happiness and love anticipated. Though she had longed for a child, she doesn't feel happy and fulfilled, sometimes being "taken over" by sadness, anxiety or a just a pervasive numbness. Mothers can feel an enormous sense of shame and guilt if they experience anything except positive feelings about having a baby.

Many women show some depressive symptoms after childbirth — it's very normal to feel teary, exhausted and emotional after you've had your baby. That's why it can be tricky to know what is normal "baby blues" and what isn't.

The baby blues tend to be labelled as postpartum depression if the symptoms intensify and last longer than a couple of weeks. You can think of it as a continuum with some mild depressive symptoms at one end and severe postpartum depression or even postpartum psychosis at the other end. Help must be sought immediately if the mother experiences severe symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions or has thoughts of harming herself or the baby.

You are not alone

Postpartum depression is estimated to affect 1 in 8 new mothers within a year after they give birth. It is sometimes described as the "smiling depression" as mothers often keep their difficulties to themselves. The general symptoms of postpartum depression are quite similar to normal depression and will vary for each woman. Some mothers may experience severe sadness or emptiness while others might feel numb; there could be a belief around being a failure as a mother, while some women might worry excessively about their baby or show a lack of interest.

Getting help

Start by opening up to the people closest to you who you know will be supportive and encouraging. Make an appointment with your GP or healthcare provider and enquire about counselling options or / and a referral to a psychiatrist. Some women may need medication while for others psychological support will be enough to help them through this difficult time.

With the right help and support you will be well. Reach out today!

Tips for coping

- Find someone to talk to about your feelings. Open up to your partner, a good friend, your own mother or someone you know who will listen with compassion and care.
- Join a Support Group – it can really help to know that you are not on your own.
- Ask for practical help with childcare, chores, and errands.
- Find time for yourself. Try exercising, walking, taking a bath, or something else you enjoy. Give yourself 15 minutes a day at least.
- Eat a good, healthy diet. Eat small, frequent meals.
- Keep a diary: Write down your feelings and thoughts.
- Know that parenting is hard so let go of perfection, a tidy house or manicured nails. You are doing your best!

In the meantime you can find some great resources here:

[PostPartumProgress](#): Great online community - read about other mum's stories, get information and support.

[Postpartum Support International](#): Well researched PND facts and information.

Infant Risk or [Mass General Women's Mental Health Center](#): Current evidence-based information on treatment of mothers through medication.

[Mindful Mums Support Group](#): Free and confidential support group for mothers in Singapore.

By Silvia Wetherell, counsellor specialised in perinatal mental health with More Mindful and co-founder of Mindful Mums, free support groups for mothers.