

Living with Postnatal Depression

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When you would see the name of this article, you may start thinking why we (men and women) should know about postnatal depression or why it is so important? Well, let me explain the reasons why we should acknowledge and care about postnatal depression in woman. Men would think that they don't need to know this as because it is a female matter. On the other hand, women would think that they don't need to know this until someone gets pregnant or having a baby. But believe me, this is something all you should know to restore your happy family life along. I have a confession to make; I even did not know anything about postnatal depression until I arrived in Australia. In Bangladesh, we have so many problems – so many economic, social and cultural well-established constraints that we have to deal with, we do not even try to explore other hidden causes which might be creating problems in our family lives. Yes, postnatal depression is one of the hidden problems which is not well acknowledged by our society yet. Postnatal depression affects up to 15% of childbearing women. If you have been listening my radio program regularly, you might have heard about postnatal depression already. However, after hearing some recent stories of our community has inspired me to write about this matter again. I hope, this article will help you to identify some problems around you.

What is postnatal depression: The arrival of a new baby is usually a happy event but it can also be a stressful time during which many adjustments have to be made. The first few months after the birth involve enormous changes for mothers, fathers and the rest of the family. This could cause some behaviour difficulties. Mood changes are common after childbirth and are likely to occur for the parents. Eighty per cent of all women who have given birth experience a feeling of emotional distress and tearfulness during the first week after birth. This condition usually passes within a few days. But Postnatal Depression is an illness that occurs in the months following childbirth. It's the most common psychological complication of childbirth, and can arise at any time in the first year after your baby is born. It affects one in 8 women after delivery of a child. Postnatal depression is much more than 'feeling unhappy' or 'feeling depressed' and is beyond the woman's control.

Causes of postnatal depression: Variations in hormone levels during pregnancy and a combination of physical, psychological and social factors contribute to postnatal depression. For example, personal history of depression, depression during the pregnancy, difficulties in the relationship with partner, lack of practical and emotional support; and an accumulation of stressful life events.

Symptoms: Not everyone with postnatal depression will have same symptoms. The severity of the illness depends on the number of symptoms, their intensity and the extent to which they impair normal functioning. Most common symptoms are sleep disturbance unrelated to baby's needs, sudden waking, bad dreams, early morning waking, inability to sleep even when the baby is asleep, oversleeping, appetite disturbance, chronic, exhaustion or hyperactivity, crying or wanting to cry without knowing why, feeling unable to cope, sensitivity to noise, anxiety, hyperventilation, dizziness,

feeling as if 'you are not there', negative, obsessive or morbid thoughts, feeling that life has no meaning, loss of concentration, memory, self confidence & self esteem, and fear of being alone & social contact.

Consequences: Postnatal depression can have long-term consequences for women, their partners, the infant, other children and family members. It is therefore important to discriminate between difficult marital and parenting adjustments in the early postnatal period and the symptoms of clinical depression. Sometimes the mother-baby relationship is very normal and sometimes the relationship is clouded because the feelings of postnatal depression are isolating in themselves. It's not what one wants to happen or what one has control over happening at the time, but sometimes is just what does happen. It's like a feeling of inner withdrawal to the point of 'everybody out there'. These feelings may come and go as the symptoms of postnatal depression fluctuate. Sometimes these symptoms make you feel numb, as if you have nothing to give. This is not you as a person; this is symptomatic of postnatal depression.

Treatment: Many women feel ashamed if they are not coping with motherhood, believing this should be the happiest time of their lives. So they hide their difficulties. Mothers are more concerned about the baby instead of recognising their own problems. It's very important for any one of you to seek proper assessment and treatment if you think a person may have postnatal depression.

There are several treatment options for depression, including counselling, psychotherapy, group treatment, support strategies and medication. The best approach will depend on an assessment of individual needs, the severity of your symptoms and the services available in the community. Counselling and support groups may be useful for women with mild depressive symptoms or adjustment problems, while a combination of antidepressant medication and psychotherapy might be required to treat moderate to severe depression. General practitioner or community nurse can help find out which is the best option, and can refer to other health professional as necessary.

How can we handle: Women suffering postnatal depression need gentle reminders and frequent reassurances that this will happen in time. She may need much praise and positive encouragement. It's a matter of getting everyone's needs met during this difficult time. It's no-one's fault. The causes are not certain. Postnatal depression has been documented for 2 centuries, but has been overlooked in recent decades. It must be kept in mind that the condition is temporary and that with support the woman will recover. It may take some time to recover and support for the duration is essential. Please, try to accept that postnatal depression is an illness which responds to treatment and support. At times, a woman with postnatal depression may not be able to be alone and will need company. She may not be able to function domestically at times, so others will need to help with shopping, with caring for the baby and other children and help housework. She is not being lazy; she will do these activities again when she feels able. She may not feel up to talking about how she feels, so don't take her silence as personal rejection. Just let her know 'you are there'. Most women with

postnatal depression say they feel very irritable towards their husbands but don't understand why. If marital stress is due to postnatal depression, then as the postnatal depression is supported, the marital relationship improves although it may be under stress until recovery from postnatal depression. It is important with postnatal depression not to take the irritability personally and react. While that is difficult, with postnatal depression it is a symptom of a condition, not a personal reaction.

Having inadequate understanding of the psychological changes accompanying pregnancy and parenting and therefore blaming themselves, being unclear about how to recognise depression and knowing how to access help and resources are still remain as main obstacle to handle this illness. Once the baby is born, most women need their partner to be considerate, helpful and understanding. Differences in their daily experiences and mismatched expectations of each other at this crucial time can lead to a build-up of resentment in the relationship. I believe that a significant number of families in our community have been experiencing with this problems and passing difficult time. Please, do not be ashamed, try to identify the severity of problems and discuss these issues with your general practitioner before it causes more damage in your life.

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