



Women's Health Care Centre  
Peterborough Regional Health Centre

## Coping with a Postnatal Mood Disorder:

*Here are some things you can do to make this difficult time easier:*

- **If you think something is wrong, seek professional support.** Do not blame yourself. It is not your fault! At least one in ten women experience PNMD and many have no history of mental illness of any kind.
- **Try to rest when your baby sleeps,** if your mind is racing – tell your doctor. Enlist family or friends to look after the baby so you can get some rest.
- **Try to eat well.** If you have no appetite, tell your doctor or midwife. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- **Remember that good mothers make mistakes.** Having a PNMD has nothing to do with your abilities as a mother. It is an illness that is treatable and you should be commended for seeking help. Try not to compare yourself to other mothers. Avoid people who make you feel bad.
- **Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.** Confide in your partner and/or family. Let others know what they can do to help. Let someone help out with the baby or other children.
- **It is okay to have negative feelings.** Remember what it feels like to start a new job. It often takes a person six months to get used to a new role. Bonding can take time, and most mothers report a feeling of protectiveness but not love in the first six weeks. It will develop, bonding does not happen overnight.
- **It is normal to start out with all bad days or with only a few good days.** Soon the good days will outweigh the bad days. Allow yourself time to cry.
- **Stay on all medications you have been instructed to take.** Studies show that most people will stop their meds within the first two weeks. Stick with it! It can take 4 – 6 weeks for antidepressants to take effect, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about this. There are medications that are considered relatively safe to take while breastfeeding. If you are concerned about breastfeeding while on medication, contact MotherRisk at Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.
- **Force yourself to walk every day for at least 30 minutes.** Studies show that exercise can be very effective in depression. Get some fresh air. Take a deep breath.
- **Develop a support system** – People who can be a resource for information or assistance or who can just be there to listen. Keep connected with your friends – they can listen, share their own experiences, and help by babysitting or pitching in on chores. Join a parenting and/or play group. Find a support group or a counselor that you feel comfortable with. If any of these groups don't feel good – leave them. Trust your instincts. Tell your doctor how you feel.
- **Take at least one break from mothering each day.** Plan to do something for yourself – that you like to do, that you can look forward to – not something that you think you should do or that you need to do. Make a point of it – schedule time for it if you have to.
- **Make a game plan with your partner and family.** Define shared responsibilities and arrange a schedule for taking care of the baby so that you do not have to run every time the baby cries or needs tending. Ask for help from family and friends for both infant care and managing daily tasks such as cooking, shopping and other chores.

## Partners and Other Supporters:

*If someone you love has a Postnatal Mood Disorder, you can help her by:*

- **Encouraging her to talk** about her feelings and show that you understand or are trying to understand.
- **Setting visitation limits** by telling friends “NO” when she doesn’t feel like company.
- **Accepting help** – to clean the house, to cook, to do the shopping – from family and friends when they offer.
- **Saying “YES” when friends offer to babysit.** Parents need time away from a baby
- **Telling her you love her**, and not assuming she knows it. Many women feel unsexy and unlovable and need to know their partners aren’t going to leave them.
- **Picking up the slack** with the chores.
- **Being physically affectionate** without asking for sex.
- **Looking after yourself, too;**
  - ❖ Take time for yourself other than at work
  - ❖ Find someone to talk to
  - ❖ Continue to follow some of your own interests
  - ❖ Be aware of your own needs

This information and advice was taken from:

The Pacific Post Partum Support Society [www.postpartum.org](http://www.postpartum.org)

The Canadian Mental Health Association [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

The Mood Disorders Canada [www.mooddisorderscanada.ca](http://www.mooddisorderscanada.ca)

The Canadian Women’s Network, Winter 2001 [www.cwhn.ca](http://www.cwhn.ca)