

# Fathers and Postpartum Depression: “Sad Dads”

## Sad Dads?

When you hear the term “postpartum depression” you usually think of women – new moms. But postpartum depression can affect men too.

New studies show that about one in ten fathers have depression after the birth of a baby. The most likely time is between 3 and 6 months after the birth. As with women, depression can begin during their partner’s pregnancy.

## Why dads can get depressed

When a woman has postpartum depression (PPD), her partner can feel fear, confusion and a sense of helplessness<sup>1</sup>. In fact maternal and paternal PPD often happen at the same time. A dad is more at risk for depression when his partner is depressed. One quarter to one half of men whose partners have PPD also have paternal PPD<sup>2</sup>. However, men can get PPD even if their partners are not depressed.

## Many of the factors that lead to depression in new or soon-to-be mothers also contribute to depression in new or soon-to-be fathers:

- previous history of depression
- family history of depression
- worries about being a parent
- money problems
- lack of social/emotional support
- stress in a relationship
- stressful birth experience
- lack of sleep after the baby is born

## There are other factors that seem to play more of a role for men:

- changing roles and responsibilities in the family
- feeling left out when the attention from friends and family is on the mom and new baby
- missing previous relationship with partner before baby
- missing sexual relationship
- feeling overwhelmed with work pressures, expectations to provide financially for the family and being at home to participate in baby care.

## Signs & Symptoms

Men have some of the same symptoms as women. **Common symptoms include:**

- depressed, sad mood
- loss of interest or pleasure
- significant weight loss or gain
- trouble sleeping or over-sleeping
- fatigue, loss of energy or tired all the time
- restless feelings and inability to sit still or slow down
- general anxiety and / or panic attacks
- impaired concentration and difficulty making decisions
- worthless or guilty feelings about parenting ability
- recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

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## Other symptoms that are unique to men include<sup>3</sup>:

- increased conflict and anger in relationships
- increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- increased physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive problems and pain
- problems with concentration and motivation
- less productive at school, work or in the home
- frustration or irritability

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## Getting Help

The first step in getting help is talking to your healthcare provider. The signs and symptoms of depression, such as trouble sleeping, feeling irritable and being tired can sometimes be mistaken for normal adjustment to fatherhood. You may want to complete the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale, a simple mood screening tool, and take it with you when you go to your appointment.

There are a number of different approaches for treating depression: counseling, medication, support groups, self care, etc. Talk to your healthcare provider about the best options for you.

## Resources

If you are aware of the above symptoms in yourself, your partner or a family member or have further questions, please contact:

- A family doctor, nurse practitioner or psychiatrist
- Local mental health support
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline
- Text CONNECT to 741741

## Web Resources

[www.newdadmanual.ca](http://www.newdadmanual.ca)

[www.postpartummen.com](http://www.postpartummen.com)

[www.postpartumdads.org](http://www.postpartumdads.org)

Derived from Pacific Post Partum Support Society



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1 Paulson JF, Bazemore SD. Prenatal and postpartum depression in fathers and its association with maternity depression: a meta-analysis. JAMA 2010; 303: 1961.

2 Goodman JK. Paternal postpartum depression, its relationships to maternal postpartum depression, and implications for family health. J Adv Nurs. 45(1)26-35; 2004.

3 Cochran, SV & Rabinowitz FE. Gender-sensitive recommendations for assessment and treatment of depression in men. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 34, 132-140; 2003.