

Speak Up When You're Down

NEWS RELEASE

Perinatal Mood Disorders: Help is Out There for Women in New Jersey

Resources Include 24-Hour Statewide Help Line and Informational Web Site

Most new mothers – anywhere from 60 to 80 percent – experience at least a brief episode of the "baby blues" – feelings of sadness, anxiety, loneliness, or moodiness – within the first few days of giving birth. After a couple of weeks these symptoms typically disappear. However, when symptoms persist or deepen in intensity, they may be a sign of postpartum depression or another one of several perinatal mood disorders (PMD). The important thing is to understand the difference and to get help when it is needed.

PMD affect one in every 8 to 10 women, but many people do not know the facts. Any woman who has recently had a baby, ended a pregnancy, or who has stopped breast-feeding, can be affected by PMD. The disorders usually occur within the first year after childbirth, miscarriage or stillbirth, but the signs of depression can also appear earlier – when a woman is pregnant, or even planning to be.

PMD are serious but treatable. Having a PMD does not mean anything is wrong with a woman's ability to be a mother.

While the exact cause is unknown, contributing factors may be biological, psychological, or hormonal. Family members can play an important role by recognizing the warning signs of perinatal mood disorders, helping the woman seek help and providing support. The warning signs are different for everyone but may include:

- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Changes in appetite
- Feeling irritable, angry or nervous
- Feeling exhausted
- Not enjoying life as much as in the past
- Lack of interest in the baby
- Lack of interest in friends and family
- Lack of interest in sex
- Feeling guilty or worthless
- Feeling hopeless
- Crying uncontrollably
- Feelings of being a bad mother
- Trouble concentrating
- Hyper-vigilance (extreme concern about the baby's care and/or health)
- Low energy
- Thoughts of harming the baby or harming herself

Perinatal mood disorders cause distress and adversely affect daily functioning and personal relationships. If left untreated they can have long-term adverse effects on the woman and baby.

Fortunately, PMD, even the most severe cases, are highly treatable, but as with many illnesses, the earlier that treatment can begin, the more effective it is. A woman's OB/GYN, family physician and pediatrician can all be effective starting points for assessment and referral for treatment.

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services provides a statewide PMD helpline (1-800-328-3838) 24 hours a day, seven days a week to answer questions and provide information on available resources, as well as a comprehensive informational web site at (www.njspeakup.gov).

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