

Postpartum Depressionⁱ

The period of a year after delivery is very critical to the risk of postpartum depression. This risk increased if the woman suffered from depressive symptoms prior to conception or during the pregnancy. The estimate is that postpartum depression affects ten percent of women in New York State each year.

The signs and symptoms of PPD are much more severe than the common “down” feeling experienced by up to 80% of all new mothers. Postpartum depression can occur any time after giving birth, and can occur up to a year after delivery. A much rarer and more severe type of postpartum depression is postpartum psychosis. In postpartum psychosis the patient loses touch with reality, becomes delusional, and may experience hallucinations. However, only a minute number (.15%) of mothers experience this extreme form. The social stigma of having postpartum depression often encourages women to hide their feelings out of shame or fear of rejection. This type of depression can lead to divorce, unemployment, and can bring many long term emotional problems for the mother and family. Untreated, PPD in its extreme form can lead to child abuse, neglect, and infanticide, as well as maternal suicide. Despite all of the effects of postpartum depression, it is very responsive to psychotherapy, and in some cases, medication is recommended. Support groups and self help is an integral part of treatment from postpartum depression. Education and screening of women is very important due to the consequences the baby faces if the depression goes undetected and untreated. In the Capital Region there are a few support groups, including one at Bellevue Hospital.

ⁱ Source: Postpartum Resource Center of New York, Inc., West Islip, NY.