

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

Postpartum depression can place a heavy burden on new mothers. In the midst of caring for a newborn, mothers may experience intense bouts of depression and anxiety, amid an array of other harmful symptoms.

But innovative treatments are giving mothers new options to address this mental health condition. Understanding postpartum depression and the available treatments can help mothers and their health care providers identify the condition early and treat it swiftly.



Q: What is postpartum depression?

Postpartum depression is a health condition that can occur after childbirth.¹ It is a type of depression that is more intense than the ‘baby blues’ and often lasts longer, typically three to six months. Postpartum depression can affect mothers right after they give birth, but symptoms can also be delayed. If the condition goes untreated, mothers’ symptoms may persist for years.

Postpartum depression is a common condition that many mothers experience.

One in seven women develops postpartum depression after giving birth.²

MOTHERS WITH POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION CAN EXPERIENCE A VARIETY OF SYMPTOMS



Depressed mood



Loss of energy & appetite



Intense irritability



Insomnia



Fatigue



Hopelessness



Feelings of guilt and shame



Severe anxiety



Difficulty bonding with their baby

Q: What are the risk factors for postpartum depression?

Certain moms are at a greater risk of developing postpartum depression.³ Postpartum depression risk factors include:



History of depression or anxiety



Risky pregnancy



Mother's age



Social & emotional support systems



Additional health conditions & family history

However, PPD can impact **anyone**.

Q: How can postpartum depression affect mothers and their families?

Moms may isolate, feel severely fatigued or suffer from insomnia, among other depression symptoms. Women with postpartum depression also may have lower breastfeeding rates. The ripple effects can impact a family's wellbeing.

Stigma worsens the situation. Many mothers may not seek treatment because they are unaware of postpartum depression and its symptoms or don't know much about the condition. Others may interpret their symptoms as a personal failure rather than a mental health condition.

Like other mental health conditions, postpartum depression can emotionally, physically and socially strain moms and their families.

Q: How can health care providers support mothers with postpartum depression?

Health care providers who regularly meet with pregnant women and new mothers can initiate conversations about postpartum depression. By acknowledging the possibility of postpartum depression and providing educational materials, health care providers can support moms during their pregnancy and reduce the stigma associated with the condition.

Postpartum depression is also a condition that can be screened for during pregnancy.⁴ Providers can assess pregnant women to identify those at risk of developing postpartum depression. Then, they can provide these moms and their families with information on postpartum depression and precautionary steps.

Health care providers and mothers have a **variety of treatment options.**

Q: What can help manage postpartum depression?

Every mother is different, and every mother's treatment plan should meet her specific needs. For many mothers, talk therapy can provide necessary support as part of a personalized care plan. There have been significant strides, however, in developing treatments specifically for postpartum depression, providing more targeted tools for clinicians and moms.⁵

Pharmacological options to treat postpartum depression have largely been generic serotonin reuptake inhibitors. In recent years, though, multiple treatments specifically indicated and approved for postpartum depression have emerged. In 2023, the first oral medication was approved.

Health care providers and mothers have a variety of treatment options available to them. They can work together to identify the optimal treatment path for managing postpartum depression.



Q: What gets in the way of accessing treatment?

While a combination of talk therapy and medication can help mothers manage their postpartum depression, certain barriers can prevent timely treatment.

Low Awareness and Stigma

Despite the prevalence of postpartum depression, many mothers are still not aware of its effects and how common the condition is. Stigma and low awareness often prevent mothers from seeking care.

Window of Assessment & Treatment

Postpartum depression can be recognized with appropriate screening, but there is a short timeline for both assessment and timely treatment. Mothers need to be identified, diagnosed and treated swiftly for treatment plans to be effective, but they don't always receive the right testing in time.

Utilization Management

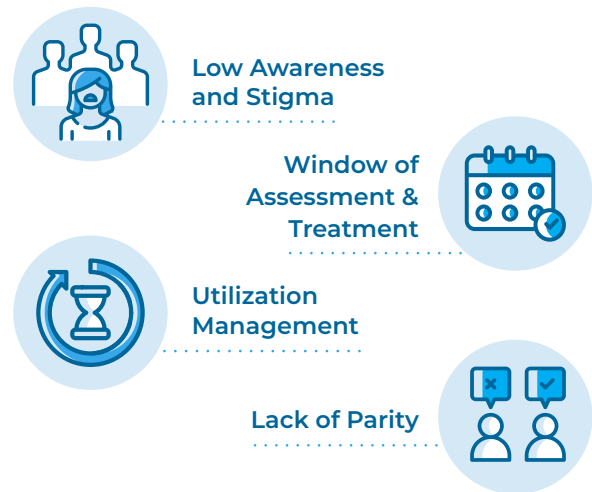
Utilization management tactics like prior authorization and step therapy can prevent patients from accessing innovative medications in a timely manner. Swift treatment is necessary for many moms to effectively treat their postpartum depression.

Lack of Parity

Federal law requires equal coverage for mental health treatments like postpartum depression, but insurers don't always abide by this rule. Coverage for the right treatments can be out of reach for mothers.

These barriers can prevent mothers with postpartum depression from accessing the treatment needed to manage their condition.

BARRIERS TO POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION TREATMENT



Q: What policies can help ensure moms can access the right treatment?

Good policies that allow for patient-centered care can help mothers and their providers overcome access barriers.

Raising awareness of postpartum depression is one necessary step. Increased education at the provider and patient level can help reduce stigma and encourage moms to seek screening and diagnosis. Policies can also support mothers by ensuring that screening for postpartum depression is reimbursed properly.

Utilization management presents one of the greatest challenges for both patients and providers. It can stand in the way of screening and treatment options. Limiting these tactics and ensuring appropriate coverage will allow providers to treat patients to the fullest of their ability and will encourage more widespread screening. Policies should ensure that providers have access to the full range of evaluation and treatment options as they chart a treatment path that works for each individual mother.



CONCLUSION

Postpartum depression is a mental health condition that is too often shrouded in shame and stigma.

However, good policies, increased education and appropriate coverage can improve the likelihood of successful screening, diagnosis and treatment.

New moms need every tool at their disposal, and the right treatment can set mothers up to successfully manage their postpartum depression.

RESOURCES

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