

Baby Blues

Professor Matt Sanders

FOR FIRST-TIME PARENTS, THE ARRIVAL OF A HEALTHY BABY DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN ENDLESS JOY. CHILDBIRTH IS PHYSICALLY DEMANDING, BABIES REQUIRE LOTS OF ATTENTION, AND HOUSEHOLD ROUTINES ARE RADICALLY ALTERED.

Even experienced mothers can have mixed feelings about their new baby. As many as two-thirds of mothers feel emotionally fragile or numb in the first 10 days after childbirth.

The so-called “baby blues” usually appear around the third day after childbirth and are typified by tearful, easily upset mothers.

Both mothers and fathers need to be aware of adjustments and pay attention to their own feelings and behaviour as well as those of their partner.

The cause of baby blues probably stems from a combination of tiredness, the stress of childbirth and hormonal changes.

The extent to which a mother may feel sad or down may be affected by issues like:

- Feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility of a new baby, family demands and household chores;
- Finding parenthood is not what was expected;
- Lack of contact with other adults;
- Loss of old lifestyle
- Unhappiness over how you look.

So it's important to look after yourself and be realistic about household tasks.

When your baby's asleep, have a rest. If you have a partner, ask them to look after the baby to give you a break. Plus arrange time alone with your partner — your relationship is important. If you have older children, they too will need some special time. And do something for yourself; even half an hour a day can make a big difference.

For most parents who experience “baby blues”, the feelings pass quickly, and with care and support, no long-term effects occur. In some cases however, a more lasting depression develops that interferes with daily activities and runs for more than two weeks. This is postnatal depression and affects up to one in five mothers.

Depression drains you of energy, confidence and enjoyment. Mothers suffering postnatal depression may be unable to gain any pleasure from tending to their baby's needs and feel resentment toward them. Depressed mothers often feel ashamed; that somehow they are the only ones who can't cope with being a parent.

Many mothers don't recognise postnatal depression. Even if you're not sure, talk with a professional, such as your doctor, if you feel it's all getting too much. Early treatment and support will help you get on to enjoying family life.

Find more parenting tips at: manitoba.ca/triplep or call 945-4777 in Winnipeg or toll-free 1-877-945-4777.

Professor Matt Sanders is founder of the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program.

