

7 POST-PREGNANCY FEELINGS NO ONE WARNS YOU ABOUT

By Maria Barillaro

Not sure what to expect after giving birth? Here are some post-pregnancy emotions we wish we'd known about!

Everyone has advice when it comes to what to expect during pregnancy, but few people take the time to prep preggos for the emotional roller coaster that ensues post-delivery. I myself went through a few ups and downs in the days after my children were born. When an item I ordered for my daughter's nursery was the wrong shade of purple, I cried for an entire day!

Here are a few feelings you may find yourself dealing with after giving birth. And trust us—they're totally normal.

1. Sadness

Your eyes could resemble a leaky faucet after delivery: the water just won't stop dripping out! Does this mean you're sad to be a mom? Of course not! It's normal to cry over little things, like not knowing how to change a diaper very well—or when you find out Netflix stopped airing your favorite series before you had the chance to see the finale. Susan Feingold, PsyD, a clinical psychologist and adjunct professor at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, Chicago Campus of Argosy University, says feelings of intermittent sadness, weepiness, and emotional oversensitivity are not unusual. They're a common part of the baby blues, a temporary state of mood changes that last no more than a few days or weeks. «Baby blues are not to be confused with postpartum mood and anxiety disorders,» warns Dr. Feingold, who is also the author of *Happy Endings, New Beginnings: Navigating Postpartum Disorders*. Severe mood and/or anxiety symptoms combined with symptoms such as loss of motivation, sleep disturbances, disturbing thoughts, feelings of hopelessness, or thoughts of suicide should be addressed right away.



2. Fear

You'll quickly see that being a mother brings with it a whole set of new fears, even if you were never the worry-wart type before. From minor fears to more complex ones, the feeling of fear can be overwhelming for many mothers in the early stages of parenthood. You're not alone on this one, as new mom Francesca Chiarappa from Montreal, Quebec, Canada, can attest. «I was afraid of being alone with her,» she says of how she felt after her daughter was born. «Will I know what to do with her? How much to feed her? How to soothe her?» Being afraid that you won't do what's right for your child because you don't know the first thing about parenting is not a new feeling. It's just new to you. You're definitely not the first mother to battle with fears—even irrational ones—and you certainly won't be the last.

3. Joy

You know your baby will bring great joy into your life, but you don't really know how overwhelming that joy can be until your little one is born. Your positive emotions are exaggerated post-delivery just like your negative ones, and this overwhelming happiness usually finds its way into the mix, making you feel an incredible natural «high» at times. It's almost unbelievable that someone so tiny, who doesn't do much, can bring you so much joy that it moves you to tears. A yawn, a cough—these seemingly normal things

can actually be triggers for some of the happiest moments in your life. From weeping tears of joy to giggling uncontrollably over the silliest thing, the top of the roller coaster is pretty awesome. «After the births of two of my kids my husband and I settled in to watch a movie and it was just too funny—both times we had to turn it off because it was causing me to nearly hemorrhage!» says Elaine Zamonski, a mom of three in Dayton, Ohio. «The first time was Pootytang, the second time was Stepbrothers. I tried Stepbrothers again day two postpartum and was still driven to fits of painful laughter.»



4. Anger

Maybe no one admits it, but it's perfectly normal to have some feelings of anger in the days after delivery. Whether it's being angry at yourself for not knowing the first thing about breastfeeding, or being downright mad at the world because you don't know how to get your baby to stop crying, it's normal. Dr. Feingold explains this is not uncommon, especially in women who have high expectations or tend towards perfectionism. However, she warns about the severity of it. «Significant anger and irritability can be a symptom of postpartum mood disorders,» she says. If your symptoms prevent you from coping, Dr. Feingold recommends contacting your OBGYN or midwife to ask for names of mental health providers in your area. You can also visit postpartum.net for information and referrals.

5. The Jitters

You may find yourself on edge in the weeks after giving birth. You may be more easily startled, very tense, or even very anxious. This can be unsettling to someone who has never really felt this way in life before. Rest assured, this is not unusual. You aren't sleeping, you're worrying—oh yeah, and you just had a baby! During the first two weeks after delivering both of her sons, mom of two Nadia D'Addona from Montreal felt as though she was suffering from anxiety attacks. «Both times, I felt extremely overwhelmed,» she says. But as she adjusted to her new life, those feelings of anxiety disappeared.

6. Hypersensitivity

A very normal feeling after giving birth is that of sensitivity. You may feel deeply affected emotionally by everyone and everything. Watching the news could have you in tears, leaving you feeling deep sorrow for total strangers. Your emotions are all over the place, and your instinct to nurture everything may be coming into play. You don't necessarily have postpartum depression just because you can't seem to hold back the tears. «I cried nonstop for two weeks, not out of sadness but for stupid reasons like my husband hadn't vacuumed, or that my baby was so sweet and I couldn't stop hugging her,» Zamonski says. «I just cried and cried and cried, for literally every and no reason.» According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, postpartum blues will usually get better in no more than two weeks without treatment. If it lasts longer, talk to your doctor.

7. Doubt

Not many mothers will admit to it, but the feeling of doubt—as in doubting whether you should have even had children or whether you're capable of doing the job—is actually normal. We tend to think that mothering is an instinct so we will know exactly what to do when our babies are born, but that isn't the case. When breastfeeding wasn't going as smoothly as planned, new mom Amanda Starnino from Montreal started to doubt whether she was right for motherhood. «I thought, this is the one thing I'm supposed to do for my baby as a mother, and I can't even do this,» she explains. Though these feelings are normal, try to remember not to be too hard on yourself. The post-delivery weeks are a learning process for both

you and your baby. Don't doubt yourself as a parent. You can do this!

Emotional Health in Pregnancy and After Birth

Low energy or changes in appetite or sleep can be normal in pregnancy and these symptoms may be confused with depression. However, symptoms in pregnancy can lead to postpartum depression or anxiety.

Up to 80% of mothers feel very teary, irritable and worried for up to 10 days after delivery. These "baby blues" are very common and do not usually need treatment other than understanding, rest and support.

Postpartum Depression and Anxiety

Depression and anxiety can occur anytime during pregnancy or after the birth of a baby. Feeling very depressed or anxious is not normal. Depression occurs in about 15% of women in pregnancy or after birth. Anxiety can be more common. Paternal depression affects 10% of men after the birth of a baby.

Partners can get depressed too.

You are more at risk for depression or anxiety with:

- a history (or family history) of depression or anxiety
- a pregnancy or delivery complication
- poor sleep
- few supports (family, friends)
- work or relationship stress
- stopped medication used to treat depression or anxiety
- early breastfeeding challenges

Symptoms to Watch for:

- depressed or irritable mood
- lack of interest in activities
- changes in sleep or appetite
- low energy or poor concentration
- feeling guilty or worthless
- worry that is difficult to control
- feeling panicky, restless or tense

- intrusive repetitive thoughts (e.g., fear of baby getting germs) or repeated rituals (e.g., hand washing, checking)
- flashbacks or nightmares of a trauma
- thoughts of suicide or harming yourself or your baby

You should seek help as soon as possible. Symptoms can last for many months and lead to:

- not taking care of yourself, your pregnancy or your baby
- effects on the physical health of your pregnancy
- trouble bonding with your baby
- difficulty in relationships or work
- using substances such as drugs or recreational alcohol
- suicide



Take Care of Yourself

- Take one day at a time.
- Ask for help from your health care provider.
- Share your feelings with your partner.
- Sleep when you can.
- Eat healthy foods and keep hydrated.
- Plan one thing to look forward to every day.
- Be active! Go outside for a walk.
- Go to a local support and parenting program.

Anxiety Disorder

Women commonly have signs of anxiety along with postpartum depression. Anxiety and depression can also happen on their own.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you are feeling any of following signs. It may be difficult to talk about your thoughts and feelings with your health care provi-