



Build Better Support around Postpartum Depression

Giving birth to a child is one of the most rewarding and joyous times of a woman's life, but it can also be a period when she faces some mental health hurdles. These challenges can also occur just before maternity leave and after she returns to work.

What are postpartum and peripartum depression?

According to the [Center for Workplace Mental Health](#), there are two periods where expectant mothers may experience biological, emotional, financial and social changes. The first is the short time before and after delivery called the peripartum period. The other is the first year after childbirth called the postpartum period.¹

During these times, expecting mothers or women who have recently given birth may be at a bigger risk for having a mental health disorder. The [Center for Disease Control](#) reported that in 2013, 1 in 9 pregnant women experienced symptoms of major depression.²

This doesn't mean expectant mothers or women who have just given birth will develop a condition like depression or anxiety. However, it does mean they have a better chance of experiencing symptoms similar to major depressive disorders. Returning to work can help mothers who have just given birth grow confidence and earn a living. But it can also cause plenty of stress.

How you can help⁴

1. **Know the signs of postpartum depression.** According to the [Postpartum Depression Alliance of Illinois](#), some of these symptoms include feelings of hopelessness and being overwhelmed, worrying excessively, and extreme changes in appetite, sleep or concentration.³
2. **Refer them to help.** Women may avoid disclosing these symptoms to their doctors or be afraid of revealing symptoms to employers out of fear of consequences. If you notice any signs, consider referring them to your organization's employee assistance program (EAP) for proper care.
3. **Never make assumptions.** Don't assume that a woman who recently gave birth will automatically have symptoms of depression. Many women maintain good mental health during and after the pregnancy process.
4. **Ensure your employees can be screened.** Standard practices during health care visits typically don't include maternal screening and treatment referral for postpartum and peripartum depression. Have your benefits director ask your health plan to encourage participation from your employees in screening.
5. **Provide education and resources.** When you learn an employee is expecting, consider providing mental health education. This can be provided when she's considering maternity leave, during employee-human resource meetings, or through the company intranet or occupational services.
6. **Consider extended or paid maternity leave.** According to research, women who take longer periods of leave have a lower risk of postpartum depression. Statistics show that only 12 percent of private companies in the United States offer paid parental leave. Currently, 18 states are reviewing their legislation to consider adding such laws.
7. **Change your culture.** Letting a mother who recently gave birth ease back into her work life may help create less stress. Consider allowing her to workday shifts instead of night shifts to help establish routines with newborns. Scheduling flexibility can also help mothers who may not have a partner or family member helping them.

References

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2. "Advancing the Health of Mothers in the 21st Century: At a Glance 2016." The Center for Disease Control. Accessed 13 February 2019. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/maternal.htm>
3. "Symptoms of Postpartum Depression and Perinatal Mood Disorders." The Postpartum Depression Alliance of Illinois. Accessed 15 January 2019. <http://www.ppdil.org/symptoms-of-ppmds/>
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