

WHEN DAD GETS THE BLUES

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION -- NOT JUST FOR MOMS

An alarming trend has been noticed: More fathers are reporting feeling down and out after the birth of their baby.

What has traditionally been mother's territory is no longer the case. It is widely accepted that up to 15% of women report some symptoms of depression after the birth of a child. Only recently has the spotlight been broadened to include fathers. And the findings are significant. "Postpartum depression is a public health concern for mothers, father, and babies"¹ says Dr. Thomas O'Connor (University of Rochester), but we need to add that it is a liability for the stability and future of society as well. The reason being that postpartum depression in fathers doubles the risk that the child will have many behavioral and social struggles later (especially if the child is a boy).

PPD In Men

But what is PPD in men? As with mothers, about 1 in 10 fathers report some symptoms of PPD. These symptoms include, among other things:

- ~ low moods
- ~ feelings of sadness
- ~ irritability, and
- ~ hopelessness
- ~ sleeping an eating changes.

These symptoms make sense. Men and women begin to prepare for the changes the birth of a child brings with the news they are expecting a child. Here are some of the adjustments a man goes through with the birth of a child (and these are not necessarily different from moms):

- ~ loss of sleep
- ~ changes in his role in the family
- ~ mom's need for more care and attention
- ~ increased expectations and workload
- ~ decreased sense of competence as a male who is now a parent
- ~ financial strain with a new baby
- ~ marital discord that may accompany the new child



Interestingly, for men, the onset of PPD is often later than it is for moms. Women tend to experience lower moods within a month of giving birth. Fathers, however, tend to exhibit these same symptoms closer to a year or later after the birth. This may be because it may take time for some men to accept how their situation has changed and how it has changed them. Men are socialized to be strong and not to

(continued over)



More Than Hormones

Fathers cannot experience the same hormonal and chemical changes in their bodies as mothers do. Therefore, PPD in fathers raises the importance of the environment the family is living in:

- *the resiliency of the couple,*
- *the personal/social expectations placed on parents, and*
- *the relationship dynamics between dad and mom.*

WHEN DAD GETS THE BLUES



Dads and Moms In This Together

There is a 25% chance of dad developing PPD if mom has had PPD herself. This puts tremendous strain on any relationship as not only does the couple have a new baby to care for and possibly other children already, they may need to care for each other more than they expected, too . . .

Strong Fathers
Strong Families

need the help and support of others. Therefore, admitting to oneself that things are not running as smoothly as hoped is a difficult step to take. Feeling sad or upset is also a reflection of weakness or incompetence for many men. This may lead a dad to work harder or spend time doing other things that distract him from the struggles he may be experiencing at home and the unrest he is experiencing inside himself. A man may also see his role as supporting mom and therefore will commit himself to caring for her (especially if she struggles with PPD or some other illness) at the cost of caring for himself.

Impact

PPD in fathers impacts many things. The relationship with mom is a key impact of PPD in fathers. Fathers with PPD tend to have, or have had, wives/partners with PPD themselves.

And what about the children? Studies have shown that by preschool age (3-4 years), children

- ~struggle with regulating emotions,
- ~are often disruptive
- ~show fearful behaviours
- ~take less risks
- ~can be over-reactive to stimuli

These impacts are similar to the impacts seen when mom has PPD, except that mom's PPD will clearly impact both girls and boys. When it is dad who is struggling with PPD, the effects were stronger in boys, though not absent in girls. ***The impacts on children remain noticeable even***

after dad's depression has been controlled. This shows that a parent's mood and state of mind will likely leave a lasting impression on the children.

Facing PPD

While men need to be involved and responsible to their families from the start, finding ways to care for himself in the midst of what is often pressure and chaos is

extremely important. Further, a dad needs to learn all he can about PPD before the birth - how it can affect a mom, a dad, a child. Fathers can be given opportunity to talk about their expectations, personal and social, as the baby arrives. Work-places can be responsive to a father's need for time with his family.

As a father faces his own experience of being a dad and grapples with the emotions and behaviours that may come his way, he can be the best dad he can be, regardless of the challenges.



REFERENCES

1. cited in http://postpartumprogress.typepad.com/weblog/2005/10/fathers_can_suf.html

created with support from St. Joseph's Women's Health Centre, Toronto, ON 416-530-6850