

Sad Dad: Identify depression in new fathers

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Sudden and unexpected lifestyle changes after the birth of a child can trigger postpartum depression in some new fathers

After the birth of a child, family changes can put fathers at risk for postpartum depression. Long recognized as a problem affecting some new mothers, postpartum depression also can grip men. Ten percent of new fathers and 14% of new mothers are affected by depression.¹ Still, most men and their partners fail to recognize postpartum depression—characterized by mood changes after a baby is born—when it arises.

Different causes, similar symptoms

Symptoms of postpartum depression are similar in both sexes, but the causes may be different. Hormonal changes contribute to women's suffering, whereas sudden and unexpected lifestyle changes are thought to trigger fathers' depression.

After the birth of a child, a father might not get the same attention from his partner and sexual activity may be reduced. His sleep is affected, and he may feel pressure to work longer hours to provide for the family economically.² Some fathers may believe the child is a binding force in an unsatisfactory marriage.³

Depressed new dads—like depressed men in general—are more likely than depressed women to engage in destructive behaviors, including alcohol or drug abuse, angry outbursts, or taking unnecessary risks such as reckless driving or extramarital sex. Other signs to look for include depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, weight gain or loss, oversleeping or insomnia, restlessness, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, impaired concentration, and thoughts of suicide or death.

Treatment

Postpartum depression can begin within days or weeks of a child's delivery and can last one year or more. In both sexes, it can be successfully treated with psychotherapy, medication, or both. The family's involvement is critical to identifying depression in a new father. Often, the woman will be the first to notice her partner's depression. A history of depression or mental illness and having a spouse with postpartum depression increases a father's risk of depression.

References

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