Can Men Get Postpartum Depression?

by LANA BARHUM

Postpartum Depression in Men

Parenting is hard – plain and simple. And being a new dad can be pretty overwhelming. It is stressful, and there are sleepless nights for both you and partner. All of that has it affects.

What Is Paternal Postnatal Depression?

Paternal postnatal depression (PPND) is common among men after the birth of a child. The condition affects up to 25 percent of new fathers, this according to research from Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA.

Depression, anxiety and other mood disorders can occur anytime during the first year after your child is born. While PPND is a serious condition, it is treatable.

Here is what you need to know about paternal postnatal depression, including symptoms, causes and risk factors, treatment and coping.

Is Male Postpartum Depression Real?

We often hear about postpartum depression (PPD), a type of depression that affects new mothers, but most people – both men and women – have never heard of paternal postnatal depression. For whatever reason, there is little attention and belief when fathers develop depression after their child is born.

A survey from 2014, reported in the journal, *Pediatrics* finds the risk for depression in new fathers is 68 percent during the first five years of their children's lives. However, while doctors do recognize PPND, many men don't take depressive symptoms seriously or are unable to recognize what is happening to them.

What fathers need to realize is depression isn't a weakness and trying harder is not going to will it away or make it better. PPND is a genuine medical condition, and it can be life-altering for fathers, their children, and their partners.

The Stigma Around Paternal Postnatal Depression

The belief is when women develop postpartum depression, it is triggered by hormone fluctuations. Some people believe men cannot experience similar depression because they cannot be pregnant or give birth.

But research has shown a man's hormones can also shift when their partner is pregnant, and after the birth of their child for reasons, researchers are yet to understand. Testosterone levels drop while estrogen, prolactin and cortisol increase.

Fathers these days play an even bigger role than they ever have in raising their children. And they share

parenting duties and are spending more time at home, so they are not immune from the depression and anxiety that was previously thought to be only experienced by new mothers.

At least half of men who report PPND also have a partner who has PPD. While this might seem surprising, what is actually more surprising is that PPD is more recognizable, and PPND isn't, and too many men don't get noticed, diagnosed or treated.

Researchers from Northwestern University followed 199 couples during the first six weeks after their child was born and then again after 45 months. What they found from questionnaires completed by each parent was the fathers experiencing depressive moods had as much effect on their babies as mothers.

This is because both parents care for children, and gender doesn't determine the seriousness of depression. Sadness, lack of motivation, and other depressive symptoms can determine how engaged parents are and now that dads are as involved as moms, society needs to work towards removing the stigma that fathers' needs aren't as significant as mothers.

Causes and Risk Factors

There are a number of risk factors that may increase a new father's risk for developing PPND. These include:

- Lack of sleep
- Hormone changes
- Previous history of depression
- Poor relationship with the child's mother
- Poor relationship with the new father's own parents or other family members
- An absence of a good paternal role model growing up

- Relationship stresses
- Nonstandard family unit (unmarried parents or being a stepfather)
- Poor social function
- Lack of support
- Limited resources or financial problems
- Feeling excluded from their child's life
- Having a partner who has PPD. According to research reported in the *International Journal of Childbirth Education*, up to 50 percent of men with PPND also had a partner with PPD.

Next page: the symptoms of postpartum depression in men, and how to cope and treat male postpartum depression.

Postpartum Depression Symptoms

Depressive symptoms that last longer than two weeks after your baby is born are a sign of something serious and should be brought to the attention of a doctor.

Symptoms associated with both PPND and PPD include:

- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Weight loss or gain that is significant
- Fatigue and/or loss of energy and/or motivation
- Sleep issues, including insomnia and sleeping too much
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and/or hopelessness
- Severe anxiety
- Inability to focus and concentrate
- Racing thoughts

- Feelings of suicide or self-harm

There are also symptoms of PPND specific to men and may indicate severe PPND. These may include:

- Irritability, impulsivity, and/or anger
- Physical symptoms, including sexual dysfunction, backache, headaches and digestive problems
- Violent/aggressive behavior
- Avoidance behavior
- Substance abuse

Each new father will experience PPND differently. Anything that doesn't seem right for you, out of your character, or unhealthy or scary should be something to be concerned about, and you should seek out help.

How to Find Help With Postpartum Depression

The first and most important step to getting help is talking to your partner and other loved ones, and simply admitting you are struggling. Many men are not used to talking about their feelings, especially with the women in their lives, and this is something that must change for you to get the help you need.

The next step is finding a doctor or therapist who can assess your symptoms and prescribe a treatment plan. Many men can benefit from talk therapy and support groups, while others may need to add medication to their treatment plan.

Self-care is important for both parents in the first several weeks after the birth of their child.

Make sure you are making time for yourself – whether you are working out or hanging with friends. No matter what you are doing, take the time to enjoy activities that made you happy before you became a dad.

How to Cope With Parental Postpartum Depression

There are many useful ways to manage the stresses of fatherhood and manage the symptoms of PPND. Here is how to cope:

Remind Yourself What It Is All About

When you are sleep-deprived and dealing with needs of a crying baby, it can help to remind yourself why you wanted to be a father in the first place. Write these things down and read them when you are feeling overwhelmed.

Change Your Inner Dialogue

What you say to yourself has a huge impact on your mood. When you are feeling stressed and upset because your child is crying, try something like, "She a baby and needs me to be calm and collected so I can better meet her needs."

Get Support

Being a parent is stressful and overwhelming, which can lead to loneliness and isolation. Therefore, it is important to connect with others, including your spouse, extended family, other dads, or a religious leader.

Get Plenty of Sleep

Sleep can be in short supply with a new baby, but good and plentiful rest is especially important for new parents suffering from PPND or PPD. One study out of the University of Sussex finds sleep is key in preventing depression in new parents.

You can improve sleep by napping with your little one for up to 30 minutes a day to boost alertness. Other ways to improve sleep include avoiding caffeine after 4 pm, going to bed at the same time every night and waking up in the morning at the same time, avoiding heavy meals and exercising too close to bedtime, and keeping electronics out your bedroom.

Focus on Your Parenting

Thoughts and worries about your parenting can overwhelm you. Some ways to boost your confidence include reading parenting books and articles, talking to experienced fathers, or attending parenting classes.

Remember, You Matter

Research shows fathers are important to their children's development, including protecting them from emotional problems and distress when they are young, helping them do better in school and even leading to other mental and emotional health benefits. Therefore, your emotional health is important to your children's well-being and so are you.

The Takeaway

Paternal postnatal depression is a very serious condition, and without treatment, it can cause long-term consequences for the father, his child and his entire family. Proper treatment, good support, and effective coping can help fathers recover from PPND.

Men shouldn't simply have to get over depression. Get help and find the strength and courage to get your life back on track and to be the best father you can be.