

14 Tips to Prevent Postpartum Depression

The best defense is a good offense, and that's especially true when it comes to avoiding PPD. There's no guarantee that you won't get PPD if you follow the steps below, but being proactive will reduce your chances of ending up a victim of PPD, and you'll have more of a safety net to help you out if you do develop it.

Preventing PPD starts while you're still pregnant, and continues until your baby is off to college. (Just kidding. Sort of.) If this list of things to do seems overwhelming, just try one or two things.

IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE PPD ALREADY, tell your partner, provider, and best friend so they can help you get help. PPD is an illness, it's easily treatable, and it's not your fault. You will feel normal again, and you won't even have to stop breastfeeding if you don't want to.

1. Pick a provider you feel comfortable with. The labor and delivery will almost certainly not happen the way you imagine it. That means you need to trust your provider absolutely to make decisions that are right for you and your baby. Find a provider that takes you and your concerns seriously, and seems comfortable with the preferences and situation you're bringing to the experience. Don't be afraid to switch if you think the fit isn't right.

2. Find support for feeding problems while you're still pregnant. Many women attempt to breastfeed, and most of those women discover that it's not as easy as they thought it would be! While you're still pregnant, find an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant in your area at [HYPERLINK "http://www.ilca.org" www.ilca.org](http://www.ilca.org). Put her number on your refrigerator, so when you're crying on the first day home from the hospital you have someone to call for knowledgeable help.

3. Line up help for the first few weeks after the baby arrives. Caring for a new baby is hard, tiring work, but it's also lonely. Even if your partner is going to be home from work for the first week or two, you'll still do much better if you have another adult around the house for a few hours each day to help you with laundry, feeding yourself, holding the baby while you nap, and providing some adult conversation.

Choose your help wisely, though—pick someone you can stand to be around for long hours under stressful conditions. Surrounding yourself with people who are happy and kind will make the first few weeks better.

4. Drink lots of water. The more water you drink, the faster your body will flush out the toxins, reduce swelling, and start to heal itself. Try to drink a glass of water every time you sit down to feed the baby.

5. Take your vitamins. Especially the B-complex vitamins, which have been shown to help elevate mood. Consider adding a B-complex supplement to your regular multi-vitamin/prenatal.

6. Take Omega 3 fatty acids. Fish oil or flax seed oil in capsule form is the easiest to take. In addition to regulating your moods and serotonin levels, Omega 3s will help prevent plugged milk ducts, lower your cholesterol, and make your hair shiny.

7. Exercise for at least 20 minutes a day. Things that strengthen your core and help regulate your hormones (like T-Tapp, yoga, and Pilates) are good choices, as are cardio exercises that will get your heart rate up (like walking, swimming, and climbing stairs). Even dancing around the living room with your baby for 20 minutes will help.

8. Ask someone to give you a massage every day. Seriously. Evidence is showing that as little as 15 minutes of massage a day is as effective as anti-depressants in preventing PPD. Your partner and friends love you and want you to feel good, so they'll be happy to take turns giving you backrubs every day.

9. Get as much sleep as you can within the limits of your situation. It's going to be a loooooong time before you get eight hours in a row again, but the consensus among tired parents seems to be that if you can get one four-hour stretch and a few other stretches each day you'll be able to function decently. See if you and your partner can take turns so that each of you gets a four-hour stretch each night.

If you can, keep the baby in the room with you so no one has to make the long trudge down the hall whenever the baby wakes up. This is no time for heroic sacrifices on the altar of How Your Baby Should Be Sleeping, so do whatever you have to do to get everyone as much sleep as possible.

10. Turn your face to the sun. Getting 5-10 minutes of sunshine a day can really help your body feel better. As an added bonus, if you take your baby into daylight first thing each morning it will help her start to regulate days and nights better.

11. Go out every day at the same time. Whether it's for a walk around the block, to run an errand, or even just to walk around at the mall, setting a time to go out of your house and into the outer world will give your day some structure and help you feel like a normal person again.

12. Force yourself to make new friends. You're feeling insecure and puffy and tired and shocked, but so is everyone else with a new baby. You're all in the same situation, so it's an excellent time to make new friends. Force yourself to get out to breastfeeding support groups, new mom drop-in groups, the library and bookstores, and the places in your neighborhood where the new parents hang out. Then start talking to people. (Commiseration about lack of sleep is always a good topic.) Eventually you'll start to find people to hang out with and share the experience with.

13. Keep your baby as close as you want to. There are tons of wives' tales about not picking up your baby too much, but babies and mothers are built to be a close unit at the beginning. Carrying and holding your baby will help him regulate his movements, digestion, and sleep, and make him cry less. Staying close to your baby is good for you, too, as it helps regulate your moods and milk production (if you're nursing), and pumps up your biceps. Your baby will be running away from you soon enough, so enjoy the snuggle time as much as you can right now.

14. Be gentle with yourself. You're doing the best you can, and that's all anyone can do. You're the perfect mother for your child.

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