

TIPS FOR POSTPARTUM PARTNERS

I got a crash course in PPD after the birth of my first child. I remember clearly how my husband helped, and much of that has been incorporated into the suggestions I give to others. There were many times that I was in despair in spite of his help, but I cannot imagine where I would have been without it. Everything was leading me toward recovery, even when I couldn't see it. I know that I was buoyed up every time he acknowledged that I was working hard, told me that he thought I was a good mother, or that he loved me. I felt so relieved by his helpfulness around the house, his readiness to take care of the baby, and his suggestions that I take a walk or see a friend. I also felt remarkably better when I felt taken care of -- when he took charge of dinner, stroked my hair, bought me some new music, and asked how I was feeling. I always felt that he believed in me and trusted that I would get better with time, confidence, and support.

- A postpartum mom needs verbal reassurance, affection without the expectation of sex, listening, and a partner in housework. She needs to hear that she is doing a good job. You can remind her of the realities you learned about in before the baby (e.g., it's normal for postpartum life to be hard, but it will get easier.) Don't expect her to be super-housewife just because she's home all day. You are probably going back to work; she has a brand new job at home. Spend time alone with your baby, to develop your own confidence. Use the phone numbers for postpartum support if you have questions. Talk to others who have been through this. Find ways to take breaks and develop support for yourself. If you can, be flexible with your schedule. Be as realistic as you can about when you will be home, and come home then.
- Difficulty with anger and irritability are common symptoms of postpartum depression. If how she is expressing anger is making it hard for you to stay supportive, you might say, "I want to listen to you. I know this is important, but the way you're talking to me isn't working. Can we take a break and talk about it later, when it is easier for us both to talk?" Don't just shut down; real damage will be done to a relationship if you stop communicating. Verbalize your feelings instead of distancing from her. Tell her, "I know we can work this out. I want to."
- Ask her how you can help *right now*. If she doesn't know, make some suggestions. Give practical as well as emotional support. Encourage her to take breaks. If it is hard for her to be away from the baby, start with short breaks and build up. Breaks are a necessity; fatigue is a major contributing factor to worsening symptoms. Schedule some dates with her.
- You will get through this. She will get better. It won't be all at once or right away, but if you stick to a plan of healthcare, support, and communication, things will keep improving. Expect that she may have rough days for a while, even after she looks like she is "on her feet again". The graph of recovery is not a straight line; it has ups and downs that get easier with time.
- Postpartum depression or anxiety will not last forever, but neither will it go away quickly. Just because she is not all better does not mean that you are not helping. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix. It is very frustrating when a mom remains distressed even after your support and encouragement. Even if she has not recovered yet, you are helping her with every kind word, every turn with the baby or the dishes, every time you remind her that she will get through this.

How can you help?

1. Encourage her to talk about her feelings, and do not judge them.
2. Help her reach out to others. Help her find support and healthcare.
3. Help her cope (practically and emotionally). Pitch-in before she asks.
4. Offer reassurance, positive feedback, and patience.
5. Have confidence in her strength and recovery.