

A Note to Dads

Could you be depressed?

It's possible that you too may be experiencing symptoms of depression. A study by Paulson in 2006 reported that 10% of all new dads experience symptoms of a clinical depression after the birth of a baby. That's one out of every ten dads! Not only is it more common than we ever knew but if you think about it, it makes sense that some of the same factors that are contributing to a woman's depression may impact you, too. If you don't like the way you are feeling or think that something's just not right, think about this:

Some factors in your life that may contribute to feelings of depression:

- Personal history of depression/anxiety
- Family history of depression/anxiety
- History of alcohol or drug dependence
- History of obsessive-compulsive tendencies
- Change or dissatisfaction with job
- Financial pressures
- Sleep disturbances
- Marital discord
- Insufficient support network
- Ambivalence about your role as father
- Impaired relationship with your own father or mother

Depression doesn't always feel like you think it would. Some people do experience deep sadness and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness.

But you might also (or instead) be feeling:

- Irritable
- Unable to sleep
- Anxious
- Disinterested in pleasurable activities
- Distractible
- Frustrated or short-tempered
- Reckless or impulsive
- Alone or cut off from others

- Tempted to spend time away from home
- Disillusioned
- Excessively worried about finances
- Displeased with your job
- Dissatisfied with your marriage
- Rejected by your wife
- Critical of yourself or others
- Angry or overly reactive
- Restless and/or exhausted

If your wife is depressed:

If your wife is currently being treated for postpartum depression, you may be feeling additional pressure to “keep it together” while she is recovering. That’s understandable. Depending on your relationship with your wife, how she is currently doing and how bad you are feeling, it makes sense that you would need to balance what you need to do for yourself and what you need to do for your wife. But remember, you will be more helpful to her if you are strong and healthy so don’t sacrifice your well-being. The last thing she needs to worry about is how YOU are doing. So do what YOU need to do to take care of YOURSELF.

What you might do that will NOT help:

- Deny that you are feeling bad
- Try to ignore your feelings
- Hope that this will take care of itself in time
- Spend more time away from the house
- Hide what you are feeling
- Withdraw from friends/family

Think faulty thoughts such as:

- strong men don’t get sick, OR, depression is a weakness
- Work longer hours
- Spend more time acting-out, ex:staying out late, going out after work, drinking more
- Snap at others around you who are trying to support you
- Reject help

What you can (and should!) do:

- Let others know how you are feeling.
- Confide in someone you trust.
- Contact a healthcare provider that you feel comfortable with.
- If you are interested in therapy, ask someone for a referral.
- Do not let your financial concerns get in the way of you seeking help.
- Do not expect to feel better right away.
- Participate in sports or mild exercise.
- Put off making major decisions at this time.

Why it's hard to get help:

- You'd rather not tell anyone how you are feeling.
- You'd rather believe this is just normal crankiness that will go away with a good night's sleep
- You'd rather acknowledge that all new dads are exhausted and feel this way.
- It feels easier not to deal with it.
- Men tend to be less willing to acknowledge their emotional symptoms.
- Men are more likely to suppress their depression through the use of alcohol or other substances.

Why it's important that you DO get help:

Depression is a serious medical condition that affects your whole body, your mood, and your thoughts.

Everyone in your family needs you to be healthy. When you take care of yourself, your wife will feel better, your baby will feel better, and YOU will feel better. If you are worried about the way you are feeling, ask for help so you can receive the treatment you need to get back on track.