

New Mom Mental Health Checklist

Why we need this: A zillion baby registries tell you how many onesies to buy. The reality is **1 in 5 new moms will experience a post-partum mood disorder**. Often, we're totally unprepared for it.

Things to do before birth to prepare your mental health

○ **Social media cleanse:** Look at your social media feeds. Are they full of perfect-looking moms? Make sure your social media includes more realistic portrayals of parenthood — try Cat & Nat, I Mom So Hard, Scary Mommy and of course TODAY Parents!

○ **Code word for 15-minute break:** With your partner, work out a code word that means “I need a break; you need to take the baby.” When one of you reaches your limit and says the code word, there's no judgment, no questions, no need to explain, just an immediate baby handover.

○ **Practice TIPP:** These proven “distress tolerance techniques” are used in Dialectical Behavior Therapy and they can be helpful anytime your emotions are running high.

T = Temperature. Put your face in a bowl of ice water, or hold a cold pack to your face for 30 seconds.

I = Intense Exercise. Not always possible after giving birth, but even a short burst of intense exercise (running, jumping jacks, dancing) helps calm the body.

P = Paced breathing: Deep, slow breaths. Try five seconds in, seven seconds out.

P = Paired muscle relaxation. Breathe in, tense your muscles, make yourself aware of the tension and then say the word “relax” in your mind while you breathe out and release.

If I think I might need help, I will call:

Fill in the blank with the contact information of a doctor, midwife, nurse, therapist or other medical professional you trust:

Postpartum Support International helpline:

They can connect you with local help ANYWHERE in the country. If you don't know where to start, call them! **1-800-944-4773**

Know the signs (and if you notice any of them, call the resources above)

- Up to 80% of new moms experience the “baby blues,” a time when you're extra emotional. Important: The baby blues pass in about two weeks. If you experience extreme sadness after that, and it's making it hard to take care of yourself or the baby, it could be something more.
- It's not just depression: Yes, postpartum depression affects up to 1 in 7 new moms. But postpartum anxiety affects 1 in 10 new moms. There's also postpartum OCD, PTSD, bipolar and psychosis. Symptoms can start anytime from right after birth to a year or more later.
- Some symptoms that something's not right: Hopelessness, a lack of interest in the baby, panic attacks, unwanted thoughts, flashbacks to a traumatic birth, a feeling of losing control, thoughts of harming yourself or the baby.

Postpartum mental health issues are very common and they're treatable; things can get better, so don't be afraid to ask for help.

How to tell someone you need help.

Do you feel like something is wrong but you're not sure how to ask for help? Try these phrases, if any of them describe how you feel:

“I'm feeling hopeless.”

“I'm feeling helpless.”

“I'm feeling incredibly anxious.”

“These feelings are impacting my ability to complete normal daily tasks.”

“I'm really struggling and I need help.”

Sources/more resources: Postpartum Support International, The Motherhood Center and The Alexis Joy D'Achille Center for Perinatal Mental Health.