

**Role play summary:** Emily (the nurse) is educating Zach, the husband of a new mother about post-partum depression.

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**Zach:** Hey Emily, do you have a couple of minutes?

**Emily:** Sure, what can I do to help?

**Zach:** Its just that there is so much that you went over with my wife and I, it's hard to keep it all together. There's just a couple of things I want to make sure I remember.

**Emily:** It sounds like you're feeling overwhelmed by all the new information.

**Zach:** Oh yeah, you can say that again! Listen, if you've got time, I was wondering if we could go over post-partum depression again.

**Emily:** Sure. What are your concerns?

**Zach:** We didn't talk about it before, but my wife gets bad seasonal depression in the winter. Does that mean she's going to get post-partum depression?

**Emily:** Well, having a history of depressive disorders is a risk factor, but it doesn't mean she will develop postpartum depression. The cause of postpartum depression and related conditions aren't completely understood but are thought to be multifactorial.

Hormonal shifts following birth probably play a large role, but lifestyle and social factors can also be involved. You mentioned a history of depressive disorders. Some other risk factors include low socioeconomic status, poor social support systems, anxiety about being a parent, unplanned pregnancy, poor self-esteem, domestic violence, certain medical conditions including thyroid disorders and diabetes, problems breastfeeding, and multiple pregnancy.

Most women are affected by hormonal shifts, stress, and concerns about motherhood to some degree and experience mild, transient depressive symptoms. We refer to this as postpartum blues.

**Zach:** So, what is the difference between postpartum blues and postpartum depression?

**Emily:** It just so happens that I have a venn-diagram covering just this subject!

Postpartum blues and depression both fall under a category of conditions called postpartum mood disorders, but they have some important differences. As you can see, postpartum blues affect up to 85% of women, typically begin in the days following delivery, last for up to 10 days, and usually resolve without treatment. In contrast, postpartum depression is less common - affecting 10-15% of women. It happens within 6 months of giving birth and usually does require treatment.

Postpartum blues and postpartum depression do share some common symptoms: Sadness, anxiety, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, feeling inadequate, crying, and fatigue. However, we can distinguish that with postpartum depression, these symptoms are often prolonged or very intense. We can also see that in postpartum depression, we may observe additional things like intense mood swings, weight loss, a flat affect, irritability, rejection of the baby, social isolation, decreased physical hygiene, loss of libido,

and severe anxiety or panic attacks. She may also feel physical symptoms such as exhaustion that is not relieved by sleep and constipation.

**Zach:** So, if I understand this right, most women are affected by the hormonal shifts after giving birth and may experience things intermittent sadness, crying, and trouble sleeping for a short time after delivery. That's postpartum blues, and it usually sorts itself out without treatment. Postpartum depression can show up any time within 6 months of giving birth. It has similarities to postpartum blues, but symptoms are more intense and usually won't go away without treatment.

**Emily:** You've got it.

**Zach:** So, I understand what you're telling me. But what should I do if I notice my wife is having symptoms of postpartum depression?

**Emily:** If you're concerned that your wife may be depressed, encourage her to make an appointment to discuss this with her provider. She can also talk to her pediatrician at your well baby visits. There is an assessment tool that the provider can use called the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale that can help determine if your wife may have postpartum depression. The Edinburgh Scale is a questionnaire dealing with how your wife has felt over the last seven days. Her responses are scored, with a total score of more than 12 indicating postpartum depression.

**Zach:** Okay, so say that I notice these symptoms, she sees her doctor, and she has postpartum depression. How is it treated?

**Emily:** If she has postpartum depression, your wife's provider may prescribe her an antidepressant. Other modalities include support groups, therapy with a counselor, and involving different community resources as needed.

**Zach:** Emily, thank you so much. My wife is over the moon right now with our new baby and I don't think she's depressed. But now I feel ready to help in case it happens.

**Emily :** You're very welcome. If you'd like, I can include some additional information that you and your wife can take with you.

## References

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- Ricci, S. S., Kyle, T., & Carman, S. (2021). *Maternity and pediatric nursing* (4th ed.). Wolters Kluwer.