**The Difference Between Postpartum Depression & Normal New Mom Stress**

By [Kate Kripke](http://www.postpartumprogress.com/author/katekripke) May 22, 2013

[Postpartum depression](http://postpartumprogress.com/the-symptoms-of-postpartum-depression-anxiety-in-plain-mama-english) may be common, but it’s not normal.

It’s **NOT** normal for a woman to suffer in new motherhood.  It is not normal for her to feel anxious most of the time, it is not normal for her to feel overwhelmed most of the time, and it is not normal for her to feel trapped and angry and uncertain most of the time.  There is no doubt that new motherhood is overwhelming and scary for most of us, but when these feelings take charge — when they become more dominant than feelings of relative wellbeing — there is something else going on.

I get my feathers ruffled every time that I hear someone say that their OB told them that the distress they were feeling was just part of being a new mom.  I am concerned each time a mom says that she waited to get help for postpartum depression because she just assumed that the way she was feeling came with new motherhood, that she just had to get used to it, that it would go away on its own.  I become furious when I read articles or blog entries that assume postpartum depression is caused by a woman’s resistance to all that comes with motherhood.  Frankly, it’s all BS.  I want to yell this from the treetops.

So, here, my friends, is a bit of a reminder for all of you, and perhaps something to use as a guide if you are not so sure whether the way that you are feeling needs outside support. Here’s how to tell the difference between “normal” new mom stress and postpartum depression:

**Healthy (or “Normal”) Postpartum Adjustment**

* Some feelings of overwhelm and anxiety that decrease with reassurance
* Some “escapist fantasies” (a desire to run away) that occur when the logistics of mothering are challenging but go away when you baby is soothed, when you are rested, and when you are validated
* Fears about harm coming to your baby that come and go, that you know are not “realistic” but that do not cause lasting distress, and that decrease as your experience and comfort with motherhood grows
* Sleeplessness that occurs from caring for your baby at night, while still having the ability to sleep when your baby is sleeping or when given the option to rest
* Fatigue that comes from late night feedings and interrupted sleep
* Some feelings of frustration towards your partner regarding differences in parenting choices or differing roles
* Moments of sadness, disappointment, or anger towards your parents when reminded of the ways that you were parented, but the ability to hold insight and perspective regarding your own relationship with your baby
* Feelings of isolation that are caused by the increased time spent with your baby especially when a newborn, but also a desire and motivation to connect with others
* Uncertainty that comes with this new job, and building confidence that comes with time
* A hesitancy and worry that comes with allowing others to care for your baby, but a willingness to do this when you are in need of a break
* A decrease in eating that is caused by the logistics of being a new mom
* Temporary body aches and pains that are a result of childbirth and/or feeding
* Feelings of worry about your baby’s ability to latch or feed as you hoped that decrease with feeding improvement or that shift when a new feeding option is chosen
* Acknowledgement of the challenge that comes with new motherhood, but also the ability to look forward to things getting easier
* Increases in energy that come with increases in sleep
* Vulnerable feelings that come and go but that do not alter the way that you think about yourself

**Postpartum Distress that Requires Support**

* Feeling anxious and overwhelmed most of the time, an anxiety that doesn’t go away with reassurance
* Feelings of regret over becoming a mom that do not seem to go away
* Repetitive and intrusive thoughts of harm coming to your baby that cause great distress and that impact your ability to care for your baby
* Thoughts of hurting yourself
* Sleeplessness that occurs due to “monkey brain” –  anxious thoughts that will not go away
* A deep fatigue that is not alleviated with rest and/or a desire to remain in bed all day
* Lacking appetite or a need to keep eating despite being full
* Body aches and pains with no apparent cause
* Relentless feelings of anger or rage towards your partner and/or others
* Resurfacing memories about your own early childhood that cause great distress, anxiety, or sadness
* Loneliness and isolation that occur while also pulling away from those who care about you; a lack of desire or motivation to connect with others
* Persistent feelings that you’re not a good mom or you’re not good at doing motherly things, even despite validation or reassurance from others
* Feelings that your baby does not “like” you because he cries or is not feeding well
* Unrelenting anxiety about having others help care for your baby and a deep fear and inability to let go of some of this control
* Never-ending feelings that you will never feel better
* Sudden increase in energy that occurs despite a decrease in sleep; this may or may not include seeing or hearing things that aren’t really there
* A general feeling of “not feeling like yourself”
* Any uncomfortable or vulnerable feelings that persist for longer than 2-3 weeks – especially when these interfere with your ability meet your basic needs and/or live your life as you would like to

Please remember moms, new motherhood is challenging for all of us, but it should not be consistently distressing or miserable.  And it you are finding yourself wondering if what you are struggling with is “normal”- a good question to ask your self is, “Is this normal for me when I am well?”  If it’s not, there is help waiting.  You do not need to suffer through [postpartum depression](http://postpartumprogress.com/the-symptoms-of-postpartum-depression-anxiety-in-plain-mama-english).

~ *Kate Kripke, LCSW*