



Understanding Postpartum Mood Changes

Welcoming a new baby is often described as one of life's most joyful moments—but for many new parents, it can also bring unexpected emotional challenges. Postpartum depression (PPD) affects about 1 in 8 women and can begin anytime within the first year after giving birth. Recognizing the signs and seeking help early can make a world of difference for both parent and baby.



What is Postpartum Depression?

While many new parents experience the “baby blues”—mood swings, crying spells, and anxiety that typically resolve within two weeks—postpartum depression is more intense and longer-lasting. It can interfere with your ability to care for yourself and your baby.

Common symptoms include:

- Persistent sadness or hopelessness
- Difficulty bonding with your baby
- Changes in appetite or sleep
- Intense irritability or anger
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or worthlessness
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby

“

Needing help doesn't make you weak – seeking help is a profound act of strength.”

~ Dr. Natasha Sriraman

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How Is It Treated?

The good news is that PPD is treatable. Your healthcare provider may recommend:

- Talk therapy (such as cognitive-behavioral therapy or interpersonal therapy)
- Support groups with other new parents
- Medication, including antidepressants that are often safe to use while breastfeeding
- Lifestyle changes, such as gentle exercise, rest, and mindfulness practices

PPD is not a sign of weakness or failure. As Dr. Natasha Sriraman, pediatrician and author, explains, “Needing help doesn't make you weak—seeking help is a profound act of strength.”

You Deserve Care, Too

Taking care of your mental health is not just good for you—it's essential for your baby's well-being. As Dr. Sriraman reminds us, “Your health is absolutely essential to your baby's health, growth, and development. And you deserve to be healthy and happy, especially right now.”

You're Not Alone: Help is Available

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline
1-833-943-5746 (24/7 support)

Postpartum Support International:
Call or text “Help” to **1-800-944-4773** or
visit: www.postpartum.net

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
(24/7, confidential support)
Dial **988** from any phone

Find Local Help:
Contact your local Healthy Families
program at (540) 948-3916 ext. 440 for
resources and support services.

Finding “Me Time” with a Newborn: Why It Matters and How to Make It Happen

Caring for a newborn is one of life’s most rewarding – and most demanding – experiences. The round-the-clock feedings, diaper changes, and unpredictable sleep schedules can make it feel like there’s no room for anything else. But one of the most important gifts you can give your baby is a healthy, rested, and emotionally supported parent. That’s why making time for you – even just a few minutes – isn’t selfish. It’s essential. Here are some simple, practical ways to carve out a little “me time” each day:



REDEFINE “ME TIME”

Forget long spa days or weekend jaunts (for now!). Me time can be as simple as:

- Enjoying a hot cup of coffee while baby naps
- Listening to your favorite podcast while folding laundry
- Stepping outside for fresh air, even if it’s just for five minutes

These small resets can go a long way in boosting your mood and energy.



CREATE A NAP-TIME RITUAL

Instead of rushing to tackle chores every time your baby naps, try to reserve at least one nap a day for yourself. Take a short nap, read a few pages of a book, or simply sit in quiet stillness. Your well-being matters, too.



SCHEDULE YOUR BREAKS

Even if the schedule doesn’t always go as planned, having a routine helps. Try penciling in a small self-care break each day – like a warm bath after baby’s bedtime or five minutes of stretching in the morning.



TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WEARING A BABY SLING

Wearing baby in a sling or carrier can free up your hands so you can move, stretch, or even do light household tasks. You might even find time to dance to your favorite song!



CONNECT WITH OTHER PARENTS

Joining a parent group – even virtually – can help you feel less isolated. You’re not alone in feeling overwhelmed, and hearing others share their stories can provide comfort and useful tips.



GIVE YOURSELF GRACE

“Me time” doesn’t have to be productive. It doesn’t have to be perfect. And it doesn’t mean you’re neglecting your baby. Taking care of yourself is part of taking care of your child.

Remember:

Finding just a few moments each day to breathe, smile, or simply be can help you feel more grounded and more present for your baby and yourself.

Healthy families start with healthy parents. We see you, and we’re here to support you every step of the way. Reach out to your Family Support Specialist if you need ideas, support, or just someone to talk to.



StartSmart is designed to share practical tips and advice each month to help you nurture your baby's growth and development. From encouraging milestones to promoting healthy habits, **StartSmart** is here to support you every step of the way on your parenting journey!

Encouraging Baby to Reach, Grasp, Roll, and Crawl

Your baby's first movements—batting at a toy, rolling over, or scooting across the floor—are exciting signs of growing strength, coordination, and independence. These early motor skills lay the foundation for sitting, standing, walking, and more. And the best part? You can help support this growth with fun, everyday activities right at home!



Here's how to encourage four key motor skills during your baby's first year:

Reaching - helps babies strengthen their shoulder and arm muscles while improving hand-eye coordination.

- Lie baby on their back and dangle a soft toy just out of reach.
- Move it slowly side-to-side to get their attention.
- Praise their efforts - even if they just swat at it!

Grasping - builds hand strength and prepares your baby for feeding, dressing, and later, writing.

- Offer toys that are easy to grab, like soft rings, rattles, or fabric books.
- Let your baby explore different textures with their hands.
- Place toys just far enough away that they have to stretch or roll to get them.

Rolling - often a baby's first big movement, it's a sign they're building strong core muscles.

- During tummy time, place a favorite toy to one side and gently guide your baby to roll toward it.
- Encourage rolling both ways—tummy to back and back to tummy.
- Celebrate each effort with smiles and claps!

Crawling - strengthens arms, legs, and back muscles and helps your baby learn spatial awareness.

- Make a soft obstacle course with pillows or cushions.
- Place a toy just out of reach to motivate movement.
- Get down on the floor and crawl alongside them—it's great bonding and great exercise!



Each baby develops on their own timeline. The most important thing is to give your baby plenty of floor time each day in a safe, supervised space. Follow their lead, be patient, and celebrate small steps—they add up to big progress.

Important dates this month:

August 6	Orange Co. First Day of School
August 12	Rappahannock Co. First Day of School
August 13	Fauquier & Madison Co.. First Day of School