

## **Families & Postpartum Depression**

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I have decided for this article I want to write about something that has occurred in my own personal life and discuss my experience with postpartum depression. Though it occurred nearly five years ago, and I have thankfully recovered, the experience is still ever present in my life. I've met several women who are currently struggling with bonding with their newborn babies and with husbands who are trying to care for their family's well being. When I found out I was pregnant, I, like many women, was thrilled. We tried for nearly a year to get pregnant and I was literally shocked to get the good news.

Unfortunately, I had a very difficult pregnancy, dealing with nearly 9 months of intense nausea and back pain. But I knew this part of it would eventually end and a tiny little creature would join our world. The struggle continued however with an emergency C-section and some tenuous medical problems for our son. These too were resolved and my husband and I thought we could now just "deal" with the more normal challenges of having a newborn. But like 10-15% of women who experience postpartum symptoms (as compared to 50-80% of women who have the "baby blues", a short-lasting condition that does not require medical intervention, National Institute of Health (NIH), 2005), my situation got more intense. Nearly 6 weeks after the birth of our son, I began to feel completely disconnected from him. Though I tried to continue to go through the monotonous and ongoing motion of caring for our newborn, including feeding, bathing, and dressing, things progressively worsened. I was experiencing intense lack of sleep, difficulty feeding my son, and a baby with intense colic. Consistent with the literature, I began to experience the hallmark features of postpartum problems, including restlessness, anxiety, and depression, as well as feelings of worthlessness (NIH, 2005) in caring for my son. After two months of this, my husband and I realized things were not getting better. We called my OB-GYN who told me I should take up yoga and worry less; she completely dismissed my case. The suffering continued. Thankfully, my son did not. With care from my exhausted and worn out husband, my son received plenty of love and nurturance.

Then, a work colleague suggested that something might really be wrong. She gave me a book about postpartum experiences entitled *Down Came the Rain*, written by Brooke Shields, and it finally clicked that I needed professional help. We called my OB again who agreed to prescribe me an anti-depressant. Sadly, without her being trained in such matters, my symptoms got worse. My ability to care for my son become more impaired, as did my ability to care for myself. We called the OB again. Since we were insured through a large HMO, I needed a referral to see a psychiatrist. We finally got one. I saw a psychiatrist who agreed I needed help, but unfortunately, was also not well trained in dealing with women with postpartum symptoms. After nearly another 3 months of "trial and error" with various medications, I was taking about 7 medications total, none of

which were helping; they were merely masking the underlying problem or “treating” the side-effects of other medications and as a result, my symptoms got worse. Though I was not experiencing clinical postpartum psychosis (which occurs in about 1% of women, NIH, 2005), I did begin to envision what would happen if my son was hurt or never born.

We left our HMO. Thankfully, we found a non-profit serving postpartum depression and got local resources including therapists and support, all of which specialized in working with families experiencing this real problem. Within a month of working with experts, getting off all the “wrong” medications and starting on one known to be effective for postpartum, and doing intensive therapy to learn how to bond with my son, I was doing MUCH better. And by the time my son turned a year old, he had become the love of my life. We threw a grand party (mostly for me!!) to celebrate the newfound love and pleasure I finally took in his precious life. Today, he is my eternal joy.

The good news of this story is that recovery from postpartum mood disorders, even an intense case as my own, is treatable. The sad news is that the situation often goes undiagnosed and many women and their families suffer needlessly in silence. With the right support and caring ears, new mommies can enjoy some of the most precious memories in their child’s life. And fathers and partners can also know that family life can again be restored. As I mentioned above, I meet families regularly who are clearly not getting the help they deserve. I encourage them to seek support, I provide resources, and I happily share my story; I hope it gives them hope, the best medication sometimes out there.

### References

National Institutes of Health, (2005). Understanding postpartum depression.  
[http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2005/December2005/docs/01features\\_02.htm](http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2005/December2005/docs/01features_02.htm)

And for more information, please visit:

1. Down Came the Rain-My Journey Through Postpartum Depression, by Brooke Shields, May, 2006.
2. This Isn’t What I Expected-Overcoming Postpartum Depression, by Karen Kleiman and Valerie Raskin, August, 1994.
3. The Postpartum Husband-Practical Solutions for Living with Postpartum Depression, by Karen Kleiman, February, 2001.
4. Postpartum Support International at <http://postpartum.net/>
5. Postpartum Health Alliance at <http://www.postpartumhealthalliance.org/>
6. Mother-to-Mother Postpartum Depression Network  
<http://www.postpartumdepression.net/index.html>