



New-daddy doldrums

Postpartum depression isn't just for new moms anymore

BY AMY LEVIN-EPSTEIN

Men don't have C-sections and they don't get sore nipples. But according to a new study from *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 10% of new daddies get post-birth blues 3 to 6 months after baby is born (compared to approximately 13% of their female partners). "Men go through hormonal changes just like women do after the birth of their child—there is a decrease in testosterone and an increase in estrogen. These hormone changes and sleep deprivation create a perfect storm," says California-based therapist Will Courtenay, Ph.D.

Chris Illuminati, 33, a New Jersey-based writer says his de-

pression started about a month after his son was born in March 2010. "That was when we really started to get into the continuous nights of not sleeping and the days that weren't on a set schedule. I'm [usually] always happy, and people started asking 'Are you all right?' It would get worse at night...you're up with the baby and alone with your thoughts," Illuminati recalls. Like many men who experience baby blues, Illuminati withdrew and became uncharacteristically short-tempered. "It felt like I wasn't in control. A lot of people say when you get married you don't have freedom anymore, but it really begins when you have a baby. I would look forward to run-

ning errands because I was out in the car by myself," Illuminati confesses.

Joel Schwartzberg, 42, a Virginia-based writer can relate. "When my son was born in 1999, it felt like a wrecking ball on my life. I fell into a depression and then I felt guilty about having these feelings," Schwartzberg says. Like Illuminati, he would drive to feel free—which for him meant heading to his favorite junk food outlets. "I would tell my [now ex-] wife 'Why don't you sleep and I'll take the baby for a drive.' Then I'd indulge in foods like hotdogs with mustard and sauerkraut, jelly donuts, and bagels and cream cheese," he recalls. Aside from anger and changes in eating habits, drinking, gambling, working too much, or having thoughts of an affair (or actu-

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SOURCE: THE JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

ally having one) can be red flags as is a change in personality. “If the spouse says ‘Who is this person?’ there’s a good chance depression is happening,” says therapist Patricia O’Laughlin, MFT, MTR, from the Center for the Psychology of Women in Silver Lake, CA. A prime example is an eager dad-to-be turned distant dad. “When she was pregnant, we were happy and excited about the baby. But the moment we got home, it was a shock to the system,” Schwartzberg says.

Unfortunately, experts say many men are suffering in silence. “There is so much focus on the women and PPD, professionals aren’t looking for it in men when the couple comes in,” O’Laughlin says.

Illuminati observes, “If you have three new moms together, they’re talking about how they feel. If you have three new dads together, they’re like ‘So who’s playing this weekend?’ There’s the whole ‘suck it up’ mentality.” And while Schwartzberg says he was criticized and called a coward



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after sharing his experience in *Newsweek*, he’s since realized he’s not alone.

“I had no idea there were

other dads who were going through the same thing until I started to meet them as a result of my writing.

If you or your partner is struggling, help is available—and crucial. “We know that when left untreated, postpartum mood disorders often worsen and can ruin a marriage and career and lead to financial problems. A father’s depression can also have a negative impact on the child’s emotional and behavioral development,”

says Courtenay, who suggests therapy, possibly augmented with medication. And never underestimate the importance of some solid shut-eye. “This can be as simple as taking turns getting up with the baby every other night, limiting caffeine, or using mild sleep aids,” Courtenay says. Additional resources—include a self-test and forums—can be found on Courtenay’s website, Postpartummen.com.

As for both Schwartzberg (now father to three) and Illuminati, their respective depressions diminished. “Finally those babies who are so needy start to smile, and you begin to feel bonded with them. As they grow, you can identify a piece of them with you. That put the final nail in a coffin of my depression,” says Schwartzberg, who did not seek help but wishes he had. Illuminati’s story has a similar ending: “It’s like a new job. You freak out the first few days until you start getting into a rhythm of it.” 

Amy Levin-Epstein has written for *Glamour*, *Self*, *Prevention*, *Redbook*, and the *Boston Globe Magazine*. Read more at AmyLevinEpstein.com.

Are you at risk?

These risk factors may make some new dads more likely to become depressed

STRESS: This includes exhaustion as well as financial or marital anxiety.

PARTNER WITH PPD: Putting emotional energy into bolstering your partner up can take its toll.

HISTORY: If you were depressed in

the past, a baby can trigger a recurrence.

NEW-DAD ANXIETY: Worrywarts may be more prone to problems coping.

SICK OR COLICKY BABY: Caring for a sick and sleepless baby can trigger depression.

LACK OF CONNECTION: Bonding sometimes doesn’t happen instantly. The reasons vary, but stay as involved as possible. Hold your baby!

PERFECTIONISM: Babies can cause chaos in a formerly calm household.