

SCIENCE &amp; WELLNESS

# New Research Shows That Dads Can Also Experience Postpartum Depression

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POSTED ON  
~~September 19, 2017~~ (September 19, 2017)



25



1



For many, the first days, weeks, and months of parenthood can feel like an emotional roller coaster. Stress, hormones, and learning to juggle the many responsibilities of taking care of another human being can wear us down and impact our emotional well-being. Many women may feel a bit “blue” during this time, while some face a serious mood disorder known as postpartum depression.

According to the American Psychological Association, up to one in seven women experience postpartum depression after giving birth. It can last for many weeks or months if left untreated, and can make it very difficult to get through the day, let alone care for a baby. Most people realize that women are at risk of experiencing postpartum depression, but new information warns us that dads are at risk as well.

With an upsurge of dads now playing a key role in raising children, more men are experiencing postpartum depression, also called paternal postnatal depression. Experts from the University of Southern California found that 10 percent of men report symptoms of depression after their child is born, which is twice the typical rate of depression in males. These symptoms can include feelings of isolation, irritability, fatigue, low motivation, weight gain or loss, changes in appetite, inability to experience pleasure, and even outbursts of aggression or anger.

Over the past few years, several studies discovered that men have biological responses to fatherhood, particularly with fluctuating testosterone levels. These changes are thought to be a result of men adjusting to childcare priorities. For example, testosterone can drop due to sleep deprivation and stress, which are quite common when trying to manage a newborn.

Now a new study published in the journal *Hormones and Behavior* by a team of researchers from University of Southern California, University of California at Los Angeles, and Northwestern University found that after the birth of an infant, decreased levels of testosterone in men were linked to an increased risk of postpartum depression. On the other hand, fathers with higher testosterone levels reported more parenting stress, and their partners reported more relationship aggression from them. The same study also revealed a surprising link: When a father has low testosterone, the mother reported fewer symptoms of depression herself.

The results were announced after researchers reviewed data from 149 couples with new babies who were part of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development's Community Child Health Research Network. Fathers' testosterone levels were tested by taking saliva samples when their infants were nine months old. Both parents were also asked about any depression symptoms they noted at two months, nine months, and 15 months postpartum. They were also asked about relationship satisfaction, parenting stress, and partner aggression.

This new research is so important because it shows how both parents can suffer from depression while trying to care for an infant. Many men may not realize that they are struggling because of an actual change in their hormone level. They may try to be the strong one and not admit to the feelings they are battling on a daily basis. It is critical that dads speak up and get help if they are struggling with postpartum depression not just for themselves, but for their entire family. Depressed dads are more likely to physically punish their children and less likely to read and interact with them. Sadly, this behavior can result in kids with poor reading and language skills, in addition to behavioral problems.

Fortunately, postpartum depression is treatable for both moms and dads. If you or someone you know is struggling with the symptoms, contact your physician who can suggest antidepressants or direct you to a therapist. Talk therapy has been proven to help those suffering to work through their emotions and identify effective strategies for managing their moods. You can also find support by contacting [Postpartum Support International](#) and the [Postpartum Health Alliance](#). Exercise, a healthy diet, mindfulness meditation, and restful sleep are also good remedies for balancing mood and hormones. Do keep in mind, however, that experts are now advising against treating postpartum depression in fathers by providing testosterone supplements because too much of the hormone can trigger aggression and end up adding to the family's stress.



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