



7 I'm a loved one of a woman who is depressed. How do I help her?

Sharing work, giving support, and supporting her treatment plan are important ways you can help her. Women who are depressed need a sense that work is shared and that she has your support without her needing to ask several times.

The support you give her can make a big difference in helping a new mother to improve her symptoms and get back to feeling like herself again.

Here is a list of ideas. Talk with her about which ones will work best.

Share the work.

- **TAKE OVER SOME OF THE WORK IN THE HOME AND CARE OF THE BABY.** Suggest what tasks you can take on. Ask the mother what you can do to help daily.
- **GIVE HER A BREAK THAT SHE CAN COUNT ON.** Take the baby out for a walk. It can help because it allows her some time when she does not have to respond to her baby. She has some time alone.
- **REDUCE HER STRESS WHEREVER POSSIBLE.** You may not be able to change the fact that the baby is not sleeping, but it may be possible to arrange to get up with the baby a few nights or let mom sleep in on the weekends.
- **HIRE A HOUSECLEANER.** Having the house cleaned once a week can make a huge difference.
- **HIRE SOMEONE TO HELP WITH CHILDCARE.** This gives her practical support and a much needed break. Childcare can also give the new parents time to do something they enjoy together as a couple.
- **ACCEPT HELP FROM FRIENDS OR FAMILY MEMBERS.** If the woman is pregnant, discuss how they can be involved before the baby arrives. Getting organized early can help to reduce worries.
- **ASK YOUR DOCTOR OR PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE TO HELP YOU FIND THE SUPPORT SHE NEEDS.** If finances are an issue and you don't have social support, there are other ways to get a break. Talk to your public health nurse about what resources there are.



Give support.

- **OFFER EMOTIONAL SUPPORT.** Listen, listen, listen. Being with her or listening without offering advice may be what she needs. Do not judge, criticize or blame her.
- **GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT.** A woman with depression in pregnancy or after the birth is going to be hard on herself. Reassure her that she is doing a good job as a mother, partner or in other roles that are important to her. Find something everyday that you can tell her you admire and appreciate about her.
- **TRY TO UNDERSTAND HER NEEDS.** Ask her what kind of support she needs from you.
- **REASSURE HER THAT SHE WILL GET BETTER AND THAT IT MAY TAKE SOME TIME.** It's not helpful to tell her:
 - She should get over this.
 - You are tired of this.
 - She should be happy.
 - To lose weight or work on her appearance in other ways.
 - She "asked for this" by wanting a baby.
- **REMIND HER THAT YOU LOVE HER AND THAT HAVING DEPRESSION DOES NOT CHANGE HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT HER.** Tell her you will stand by her and show her this by using the ideas in this section.

Support her treatment plan and take it slowly.

- **LEARN ABOUT DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY.** This may help you separate the person from the illness and realize that her behaviour and comments may not be directed at you. Let her be in charge of her treatment decisions. Support her choices. Do not become the expert about her illness.
- **BE INVOLVED IN HER RECOVERY AS MUCH AS SHE ASKS.** She may ask you to go with her to doctors' appointments. She may ask your help to do healthy behaviours such as going for walks. Know when to back off so that she does not feel pushed or forced.
- **HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.** New mothers are usually surprised at how hard it is to 'get anything done' with a new baby in the home. Caring for a baby is a full time job.



- **POINT OUT AND FOCUS ON HER SUCCESSES.** Positive feedback usually motivates women to do even more to manage their depression. It helps create a positive cycle. Remind her that ups and downs are normal. They are to be expected and are not a sign of failure.
- **REWARD EFFORT, NOT OUTCOME.** It is important to reward your loved one for the effort she is putting into managing her depression — even if her attempts are unsuccessful at times. Compliment her. Plan something special to help her stay with the treatment plan until she sees changes in her symptoms because of her efforts.
- **BE AWARE THAT YOUR LOVED ONE MAY STILL BE MOODY, UPSET OR ANGRY.** This should happen less often with treatment and support.
- **UNDERSTAND THAT HER SEXUAL FEELINGS WILL RETURN.** Show affection and be intimate without pressuring her for sex. Find other pleasurable activities to share together.

It is common for partners, family and friends to feel stressed when a woman has depression during pregnancy or after the birth of the baby. You may even feel resentment, anger, guilt or fear. Living with someone with depression is not easy. It is important to take care of yourself and be flexible with how you do this.

- **TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH.** It can be difficult to support someone going through depression. It is important that you are doing things to maintain your own well-being. Make sure that you take time for yourself. Remember to be flexible. If mom has had a demanding day at home, it may be better to plan your time out for a different day.
- **FIND SOMEONE YOU CAN TALK TO HONESTLY ABOUT HOW YOU ARE FEELING AND HOW HER DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY AFFECTS YOU.** This may be a friend, a family member or a support group.
- **SEEK HELP FOR YOURSELF IF YOU ARE NOT COPING OR AT RISK OF DEPRESSION.** www.heretohelp.bc.ca the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information Website gives more information about depression and anxiety.

Remember, you can't make your loved one well, but you can offer support, understanding and hope that will help her. Each woman will experience depression with different symptoms. The best way to find out what she needs is by asking questions.