A
fter the birth of a child, family changes can put fathers at risk for postpartum depression. Long recognized as a problem affecting some new mothers, postpartum depression also can grip men. Ten percent of new fathers and 14% of new mothers are affected by depression. Still, most men and their partners fail to recognize postpartum depression—characterized by mood changes after a baby is born—when it arises.

Different causes, similar symptoms
Symptoms of postpartum depression are similar in both sexes, but the causes may be different. Hormonal changes contribute to women’s suffering, whereas sudden and unexpected lifestyle changes are thought to trigger fathers’ depression.

After the birth of a child, a father might not get the same attention from his partner and sexual activity may be reduced. His sleep is affected, and he may feel pressure to work longer hours to provide for the family economically. Some fathers may believe the child is a binding force in an unsatisfactory marriage.

Depressed new dads—like depressed men in general—are more likely than depressed women to engage in destructive behaviors, including alcohol or drug abuse, angry outbursts, or taking unnecessary risks such as reckless driving or extramarital sex. Other signs to look for include depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, weight gain or loss, oversleeping or insomnia, restlessness, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, impaired concentration, and thoughts of suicide or death.

Treatment
Postpartum depression can begin within days or weeks of a child’s delivery and can last one year or more. In both sexes, it can be successfully treated with psychotherapy, medication, or both. The family’s involvement is critical to identifying depression in a new father. Often, the woman will be the first to notice her partner’s depression. A history of depression or mental illness and having a spouse with postpartum depression increases a father’s risk of depression.

References

Dr. Gogineni is head of child and adolescent psychiatry and Dr. Newmark is chief, department of psychiatry, Cooper University Hospital, Camden, NJ.

Sad Dad: Identify depression in new fathers
Rao Gogineni, MD, and Thomas Newmark, MD

Sudden and unexpected lifestyle changes after the birth of a child can trigger postpartum depression in some new fathers

Wanted: Your Pearls
CURRENT PSYCHIATRY wants your Pearls—clues to an oft-missed diagnosis, tips for confronting a difficult clinical scenario, or a treatment change that made a difference.

To submit a Pearls article:
• Stick to a single topic, narrowly focused, that applies to most psychiatric practices
• Length: 600 words
• Provide your full name, address, phone number, and e-mail address. E-mail to erica.vonderheid@dowdenhealth.com