Postpartum Depression

Many women experience difficulties regulating their mood and emotions following pregnancy. Here are some facts about postpartum depression, which is the most serious mood disorder that women can experience following the birth of a child.

- **Prevalence:** postpartum depression occurs in 13% of pregnant women and as many as 26% of teen mothers
- **Onset:** postpartum depression is diagnosed if a major depressive episode occurs within 4 to 12 weeks postpartum
- **Symptoms:**
  - Disinterest in new infant
  - Negative feelings towards new infant
  - Decreased interest in and pleasure from activities
  - Sleep or appetite disturbance
  - Lack of concentration
  - Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
  - Suicidal thoughts
- **Differential diagnosis:**
  - “Baby Blues” – sadness, irritability and anxiety during the 3-7 days postpartum
  - Postpartum Psychosis - .1-.2% of deliveries, marked by delusions that the infant is possessed, hallucinations to kill or harm the new infant, sometimes infanticide
- **Risk Factors:**
  - Strong to moderate risk factors –
    a) past history of psychiatric illness at any time during life
    b) positive family history of psychiatric illness
    c) depression or anxiety during pregnancy, with high levels of anxiety predicting the level of postpartum depressive symptomatology
    d) stressful life events such as losing a loved one, divorce, job loss, or moving during pregnancy
    e) lack of emotional and instrumental support, perceived social isolation
  - Moderate risk factors –
a) Maternal personality characteristics such as neuroticism, excess worrying, being nervous or self-conscious as well as anger and pessimism
b) Marital problems during pregnancy

- Small risk factors – Obstetric complications such as preeclampsia, premature labor or delivery, excessive bleeding and caesarean section

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