

Health interactives by USA TODAY



24 hours in the ER: Front lines of health care



How do hospitals near you compare?



U.S. nursing home ratings

[Influential Doctors](#)
[Family Fitness](#)
[Alzheimer's series](#)

Postpartum depression hits as many dads as moms

Updated 5/19/2010 1:33 PM | [Comment](#) | [Recommend](#)

By Liz Szabo, USA TODAY

Postpartum depression affects just as many new fathers as mothers, with about one in 10 parents affected, a new study says.

Both women and their doctors have become more aware in recent years of the risks of postpartum depression, as well as the benefits of early diagnosis and treatment.

There has been much less research on the how men cope with the stress of fatherhood, even though the mental health of both parents is critical to the well-being of their children, says study author James Paulson, a child psychologist at Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk.

Children of depressed fathers have more emotional and behavioral problems than other kids at age 3 and more psychiatric disorders by age 7, Paulson says.

TREATMENT: [Pediatricians often step in on new parents, too](#)
BIRTHS: [Mothers of multiples may face higher depression risk](#)
STUDY: [New dads' depression hurts kids, too](#)

Overall, 14% of American men develop depression, either during their partner's pregnancies or in the first year after delivery, according to the study, published today in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. About 8% of fathers in other countries develop the problem, according to the analysis, which included 43 studies of 28,000 people.

The problem seems to peak when babies are 3 to 6 months old, a time when 25% of new fathers and 42% of mothers report depression, the study says.

"It's quite shocking," says neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine, a professor at the University of California-San Francisco and author of *The Male Brain*, who wasn't involved in the new study. "What doctors need to be alerted to is that they're treating a family unit."

Mothers and fathers share many of the same stresses. Research shows that any healthy adult who goes without good sleep for a month is liable to become depressed, says psychotherapist Will Courtenay of Berkeley, Calif., who specializes in men's health.

The hormonal changes that follow childbirth can trigger depression in both men and women, Brizendine says. After delivery, estrogen and progesterone levels fall sharply in women, while testosterone levels plummet in men. Both changes are associated with depression, she says.

About half of husbands of women with postpartum depression also suffer from the condition, says Courtenay, who wasn't involved in the study.

Yet fathers with postpartum depression are less likely than women to get help, partly because men tend to avoid mental health care, Paulson says. Unlike women, who see their obstetricians frequently during pregnancy and again six weeks after delivery, men may go years without seeing a doctor.

ON THE WEB: [Find your score on the postnatal depression scale \(pdf\)](#)

Fathers are also less likely than mothers to take children to their pediatricians, some of whom now screen new parents for depression, Paulson says.

But men face unique pressures, Courtenay says. Although fathers today are more involved in childrearing than ever, they often lack the broad social networks enjoyed by mothers, who are more likely to find consolation by sharing stories and strategies with friends.

Men typically turn to their wives for support, Courtenay says. But women who are wrung out by the demands of their babies may have little left to give their husbands.

Symptoms of depression in men also may not be obvious, Courtenay says. Instead of crying, men may become irritable or withdraw from others, burying themselves in work.

Doctors need to do a better job of reaching out to both parents, Paulson says. Depression in one spouse should be seen as a red flag, alerting doctors that the other parent is at high risk. He recommends that ask how women how their husband are coping. And he encourages both men and women to get help.

"You should think about your kids and your family," Paulson says. "They are going to suffer, even if you are willing to tough it out or deny it in yourself."

WARNING SIGNS

Depression may cause different symptoms in men than in women, experts say. Because postpartum depression often goes unrecognized in men, doctors say loved ones should watch for these signs:

- Increased anger and conflict with others.
- Increased isolation and withdrawal from others.
- Increased alcohol or drug use.
- Violence or aggression.
- Complaints about physical problems, such as stomach ache, with no medical cause.
- Loss of interest in favorite things or hobbies.
- Any changes that are out of the ordinary.

Source: Psychotherapist Will Courtenay

But men face unique pressures, Courtenay says. Although fathers today are more involved in childrearing than ever, they often lack the broad social networks enjoyed by mothers, who are more likely to find consolation by sharing stories and strategies with friends.

Men typically turn to their wives for support, Courtenay says. But women who are wrung out by the demands of their babies may have little left to give their husbands.

Symptoms of depression in men also may not be obvious, Courtenay says. Instead of crying, men may become irritable or withdraw from others, burying themselves in work.

Doctors need to do a better job of reaching out to both parents, Paulson says. Depression in one spouse should be seen as a red flag, alerting doctors that the other parent is at high risk. He recommends that ask how women how their husband are coping. And he encourages both men and women to get help.

"You should think about your kids and your family," Paulson says. "They are going to suffer, even if you are willing to tough it out or deny it in yourself."

You might also be interested in:

[Samsung F8000 Review](#) *(Television Info)*

[Detergent Pods Are Shrinking Soap Sales - WasherDryerInfo](#) *(Washer Dryer Info)*

[Choosing a TV: LCD, LED, or Plasma?](#) *(Television Info)*

Selected for you by a sponsor:

[Once Neuropathy Sets In, There Is No Cure--Don't Let It Happen to You!](#) *(HealthCommunities.com)*



Posted 5/18/2010 12:49 PM

Updated 5/19/2010 1:33 PM

[E-mail](#) | [Print](#) |

*To report corrections and clarifications, contact Standards Editor **Brent Jones**. For publication consideration in the newspaper, send comments to letters@usatoday.com. Include name, phone number, city and state for verification. To view our corrections, go to corrections.usatoday.com.*

Guidelines: You share in the USA TODAY community, so please keep your comments smart and civil. Don't attack other readers personally, and keep your language decent. Use the "Report Abuse" button to make a difference. [Read more.](#)

Newspaper Home Delivery - Subscribe Today

[Home](#) • [News](#) • [Travel](#) • [Money](#) • [Sports](#) • [Life](#) • [Tech](#) • [Weather](#)

About USATODAY.com: [Site Map](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Jobs with Us](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Privacy Policy](#) | [Your California Privacy Right](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Press Room](#) | [Developer](#) | [Media Lounge](#) | [Reprints and Permissions](#)

News Your Way: [Mobile News](#) | [Email News](#) | [Add USATODAY.com RSS feeds](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Podcasts](#) | [Widgets](#)

Partners: [USA WEEKEND](#) | [Sports Weekly](#) | [Education](#) | [Space.com](#) | [Travel Tips](#)

Copyright 2011 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.