

TIPS FOR HANDLING THE BABY BLUES

BY LOIS V. NIGHTINGALE, PhD

Experiencing difficult emotions after the birth of your baby can be confusing. Many new mothers experiencing the “baby blues” have friends or family members who appeared to glide right through their postpartum recovery period with ease. Comparing your postpartum recovery with that of anyone else can add to feelings of discouragement and sadness.

Fifty to 70 percent of all new mothers experience the “baby blues,” even though many don’t talk about it. This mild, temporary condition is brought about by plummeting hormone levels after delivery, fatigue, the overwhelming responsibility for a new baby, lifestyle changes, changes in body image, and may even run in families. (If your mother or sister had the “baby blues” you may be at higher risk to get them.)

If feelings of depression and hopelessness seem overwhelming, agitation becomes severe, sleeplessness becomes persistent, or your symptoms last more than a couple of weeks, it is important to discuss this with a health care provider.

THE FOLLOWING TIPS CAN HELP YOU GET THROUGH THIS CHALLENGING TIME.

1. *Spend time with your baby!* Remember how long you have been waiting to hold your precious angel.
2. *Rest! Rest! Rest!* Enjoy this time with your new baby. Let others wait on you. Enjoy being pampered for the first few days you are home (longer if you underwent a cesarean or experienced complications).
3. *Bring baby into your room or bed* to get more rest.

4. *Avoid fixed or rigid schedules*, they place undue stress on new mothers. Go with the baby’s flow and your own intuition.

5. *Avoid overexertion*. Limit the length and number of visits from friends and relatives. When you do have guests, don’t feel as if you need to play the perfect hostess. In fact, if guests find you in a robe, they are less likely to over-stay their welcome.

6. *Some exercise is good*. Notice when you are feeling weary and do not overexert yourself. Fatigue and pain can exaggerate negative feelings.

7. *Whenever your baby sleeps, rest or sleep yourself*. This is NOT the time to jump up and do those 40 chores you have been thinking about!

8. *Eat right*. Have healthy snack foods on hand. Nutritious, easily prepared foods are helpful. (Send the donuts home with grandma.) Make sure to eat some complex carbohydrates (bread, corn, rice, rye, potatoes, oats, whole-wheat crackers, etc.) every three hours to keep your blood sugar up.

9. *Drink lots of fluids*. Your body is healing and extra fluids are essential for breastfeeding. Drink lots of water. Unsweetened juices are also terrific. Avoid caffeine and empty calorie sodas. Avoid or conscientiously limit alcohol use.

10. *Get help with the housework, meals, and other children*. Take friends up on their offers of, “If there’s any thing



I can do, just ask.” Don’t be afraid to ask.

11. *Prioritize to conserve energy.* Not all housework is equally important.

12. *Thank Dad when he helps around the house* with meals or the older children, for example. A little gratitude will go a long way during these days.

13. *Hand squeezes, hugs, and kisses* between you and your partner will help keep you both going.

14. *Pamper yourself, you deserve it.* Give yourself a facial or a manicure. Condition your hair. Take a bath by yourself or with your baby. Read a “frivolous” book.

15. *Get outside.* Enjoy the fresh air. Take baby with you for a walk in a carrier. Don’t try too much too soon. Work up slowly. Listen to your body.

16. *Surround yourself with other mothers.* Find groups of new mothers with whom you can talk and do things with your babies. Some examples are: mother and baby exercise classes, La Leche League groups, the hospital’s or birthing center’s new parents’ group, childbirth class reunions, babysitting co-ops, church, temple, or synagogue groups, neighbors, or start your own group.

17. *Learn relaxation techniques or meditation.* Learn to make the most of the few quiet moments you have. Remember the relaxation exercises from childbirth classes.

18. *Focus on what you are doing.* Concentrate on the present, this precious time goes by very fast.

19. *Do fun things with your baby.* Attend baby gym classes, take walks, dress him/her up in that “adorable” outfit, go to the park and feed the ducks, take nature walks, etc.

20. *Exercise with doctors’ approval.* Ask about specific exercises and how long you should wait to begin after delivery.

21. *Be gentle with yourself,* give yourself ample time to heal. The physical, hormonal, and psychological recovery from pregnancy, labor, and delivery may take longer than you had anticipated.

22. *While it is normal to experience the baby blues,* if your feelings persist or seem overwhelming do not hesitate to discuss this with a health care provider. It is important for you to have all the support that you need during this time.

23. *Take all advice with a grain of salt.* Follow your own mothering intuition. You know what is best for your beautiful baby!

Dr. Nightingale is a Clinical Psychologist and author of “A Quiet Time for New Mothers,” “Overcoming Postpartum Depression: A Doctor’s Own Story,” and “My Parents Still Love Me Even Though They’re Getting Divorced.” For more information, visit her Web site at www.nightingaleroses.com. More articles by Dr. Nightingale and information on the Nightingale Counseling Center are available by phone 714-993-5343, fax 714-993-3467, or on the web at www.nightingalecounseling.com