

## **SOUTH VALLEY WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE**

### **WHAT CAUSES THE AFTER BABY BLUES (ALSO KNOWN AS POST-PARTUM DEPRESSION)?**

Many women experience feelings of sadness ranging from a few tears to deep depression after having a baby. It may last minutes or a few hours; it may happen only once or off and on for days or weeks. It may not happen at all. So why should this happy time be hampered by these feelings?

Extreme fatigue is certainly one factor in post-partum blues. Labor and birth generally leaves a woman drained of energy, and before she knows it, she is home taking care of the baby who seems to need constant attention. It is important to take time for yourself to rest. Mothers, husbands, or friends are usually glad to help fix meals and pick up the house for a few days for you.

While exhaustion is a large part of the after-delivery blues, the other part of the blues is biological (and out of the woman's control). For nine months, the pregnant woman's body undergoes changes as it adapts to protecting and nurturing the developing baby. Two female hormones, estrogen and progesterone, are produced during pregnancy, and they reach extremely high levels just before childbirth. Delivery of the baby and placenta brings a sudden reduction in their supply. It is known that hormonal imbalance can have an effect on a person's emotional state. It is the same type of effect as the changes that come about during the menstrual cycle.

One of the best ways to combat the after-baby blues is to understand what is happening and to know that it is natural and nothing to feel guilty about. Just as the uterus needs time to return to its pre-pregnancy size, the body needs time to back to the usual hormone levels. Meanwhile, remember that you may react to stress more intensely or worry more.

How to cope? Don't bottle it up. No one should be ashamed to cry. Crying is a good outlet for built-up emotions. On the other hand, don't let yourself get so depressed that you lost control over your feelings. Talking to someone about your feelings and concerns can be a real help. Friends are important for keeping in touch with outside interests. Remember that there are topics besides the baby. Taking short respite from taking care of the baby can also help boost morale. Grandparents or friends might be in a place to be baby sitter for a few hours.

Remember that as important as your baby is to you, there are other aspects of your life. Remember that you need time for yourself and time for your spouse/partner. Letting those close to you know what is happening, and why, can help them to be more understanding too.