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Pregnancy & Baby Index: For Moms: Postpartum depression: Genia Lee Nolin shares her experience

Postpartum depression: Genia Lee Nolin shares her experience

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Elizabeth Weiss McGolerick

Postpartum depression used to be a hush-hush affliction. Now, mothers suffering with this very real and serious condition are being encouraged to seek help, thanks in part to celebrity moms who are coming forward to share their own experiences with PPD. Actress Genia Lee Nolin shares her experience with postpartum depression and offers helpful tips to new moms.

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Actress Genia Lee Nolin, who is best-known for her time as the conniving blonde beauty Neely Capshaw on *Baywatch*, is in real life a devoted mother of three. She personally experienced the trials and triumphs of postpartum depression (PPD) after giving birth to all of her children and calls it, "One of the hardest things I've ever gone through and one of my greatest accomplishments."

With celebrities like Nolin and Brooke Shields speaking out on PPD you have probably heard the term, but may be wondering exactly what it is.

Dr. Peter Swanljung, staff psychiatrist at Friends Hospital in Philadelphia, says postpartum depression (PPD) symptoms are similar to depression symptoms that would come on for any other reason. "What makes postpartum depression different is timing. If depression symptoms begin within four weeks of childbirth, it can be classified as postpartum depression."

Symptoms of PPD

- low mood
- decreased interest in usual activities
- loss of appetite
- difficulty sleeping

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- lack of interest in taking care of the newborn
- feeling less happiness about a new baby than expected

Postpartum depression or the Baby Blues?

It's important to distinguish between PPD and what's commonly referred to as the "baby blues." Many new mothers have the baby blues in the first week or two after giving birth. "This low mood usually passes fairly quickly, and could be related to hormonal changes in the body, getting through the stress of the initial childbirth, and the adjustment of having a new baby," says Swanljung.

PPD symptoms are more severe and can go on for several weeks or more. Swanljung explains, "If the low mood lasts more than a week and is starting to affect how the mother is able to function, or she is not attentive or excited about the baby, it's important to look for other signs that may indicate this may be postpartum depression."

Gena Lee Nolin opens up about PPD

In this candid interview, Nolin shares her experience with postpartum depression.

P&B: When did you realize you were experiencing postpartum depression? What symptoms and signs did you experience?

Gena Lee Nolin: With my first baby, I wasn't sure what was happening. It took five months before I reached out for help. With my second I didn't want to believe it, but it was happening again. The third, I knew and went into it full boar. I knew I had the tools to get through it sanely and I truly think the hardest part is reaching out for help! When you feel PPD you know something isn't right. Crying, tired, feeling sadness toward everything and everybody. Those are just some of the symptoms.

P&B: Did you recognize what was happening to you and what you were feeling or was it a more complicated emotion than that, something indefinable?

GLN: At first you never really know what's happening. You think you're a horrible mom for feeling so sad. When you get to that point you need to seek help or it can get worse.

P&B: Did you seek medical help immediately or did you first try to cope with your feelings and postpartum depression on your own?

GLN: I tried to cope [the first time] unaware of what it was. With the other two babies I knew what was happening. I got the help I needed as soon as I could.

P&B: Was there one specific moment or event that prompted you to reach out for help?

GLN: When you're crying inconsolably and feel numb to everything around you, you realize you need help. Some women it takes longer than others, but we all get to our breaking points.

P&B: What treatment did your doctor recommend for your postpartum depression?

GLN: I was pointed in the medication direction. At that point however, I was fine with just about anything. Within a month or two I felt human again. I was put on a low-dose antidepressant.

P&B: Knowing what you know now, is there anything you would (or could) have done differently before, during, or after your pregnancy to help combat the symptoms of postpartum depression?

GLN: You never know if you'll get it. There's nothing you can do to prevent PPD, it just happens. So, again don't be hard on yourselves any longer. Get help and on the road to recovery. Then you can enjoy the beautiful miracle that's been given to you!

P&B: What advice would you offer new mothers who may fear that they are experiencing postpartum depression?

GLN: If you think something's wrong, it probably is... Even when you feel like you can't reach out or you don't want to leave the house... do it anyway! Call your OBGYN first to point you in the right direction. You will make it through this and at the end of the day you'll enjoy the blissfulness of motherhood after all. I promise you!

How to Manage PPD

Gina Ciagne, certified lactation counselor and director of breastfeeding and consumer relations at Lansinoh Laboratories, Inc., explains that breastfeeding can affect a mother's mental health – in a good way. Evidence-based research has shown that, "Compared with not breastfeeding, breastfeeding is associated with lower perceived stress levels, fewer depressive symptoms, and decreased negative mood."

Whether a mom is breastfeeding or not, Swanljung also offers the following tips for mothers who fear they may be dealing with PPD:

- Talk to friends and family about how you're feeling.
- Get plenty of rest/sleep.
- Eat regular meals.
- Don't become isolated – have people visit and get out as much as you can.
- Keep up with normal activities.



Most of all, Swanljung says, "Seek professional help if symptoms persist or become more severe – especially if you have difficulty taking care of your baby or think you want to hurt yourself or your child."



For more on postpartum depression:

- [Baby blues or postpartum psychosis?](#)
- [Common questions about postpartum depression](#)
- [Eating fish during pregnancy may help mood](#)
- [Breastfeeding and good fats may help new moms fight depression](#)
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