

Reassuring, positive guidance to
help you understand and recover from PPD

Postpartum Depression

FOR
DUMMIES®

Shoshana S. Bennett, PhD

*Former President, Postpartum Support International
Founder and Director, Postpartum Assistance for Mothers*

*Foreword by Mary Jo Codey,
Former First Lady of New Jersey*

A Reference for the Rest of Us!®



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**by Shoshana S.
Bennett, PhD**



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Postpartum depression — possibly more than any other mental illness — is a very private pain. Private because you can't believe you feel so empty and depressed at a time when you're supposed to feel so happy and fulfilled. You're afraid of appearing to be ungrateful, selfish, immature, or worse: A bad mother. So, you don't want to confide in anyone.

I thought I was all these things and more. I wasted a lot of time and energy on self-blame, believing my depression was caused by a personal failure or weakness — or both.

Don't do this to yourself. No one should have to go through that kind of anguish and humiliation. Accept the reality of PPD as an illness and recovery will be easier. Trust me. PPD is a mental illness, and mental illnesses have *nothing* to do with blame.

PPD doesn't care how ready and willing you are to have a baby. It strikes without regard for age, race, education, or economic background. And it robs you — and your family — of what should be a joyful time. As a mother, you deserve to fully enjoy your new baby. Your baby deserves a healthy mother who can provide the love and care he or she needs.

Back in 1984, when I experienced the first of my two bouts with PPD, I had no idea what it was. It wasn't something people talked about. I frantically searched every book about pregnancy and childbirth I could get my hands on for information about depression after giving birth. All I could find on the subject was a single

paragraph that basically said “If your wife has postpartum depression, watch out! She’s likely to accuse you of having an affair!”

Thankfully, the dark ages are over. *Postpartum Depression For Dummies* does the groundwork to help you get through this insidious illness. Think of it as a survival guide that arms you with practical, easy-to-understand information so you can avoid being trapped in your private pain the way I was.

Mary Jo Codey Former First Lady of New Jersey

About the Author

Shoshana S. Bennett, PhD, is a licensed psychologist who founded Postpartum Assistance for Mothers in 1987 after her second undiagnosed postpartum illness. Dr. Bennett is the immediate past president of Postpartum Support International and the past president of California's state organization, Postpartum Health Alliance. She is a noted guest lecturer and keynote speaker, and her work has been the subject of numerous newspaper articles around the country.

Dr. Bennett has been a featured guest on national radio and television shows, including ABC's *20/20*. For years, her popular talk radio show *Mom's Health Matters* was heard worldwide, and, like her current tele-classes, focused mainly on subjects pertaining to pregnancy, postpartum, and parenting. She's also the coauthor of *Beyond the Blues: A Guide to Understanding and Treating Prenatal and Postpartum Depression* (Moodswings Press).

For 15 years prior to her current profession, Dr. Shoshana was a college instructor in the fields of special education, early childhood development, rehabilitation therapies, and psychology. In addition to three teaching credentials, she holds her second masters degree in psychology and a doctorate in clinical counseling.

Dr. Shoshana is available for speaking engagements, workshops, and telephone consultations. You can contact

her through her Web site at
www.postpartumdepressionhelp.com.

Dedication

To my daughter, Elana, whose beautiful and persevering spirit not only survived, but is thriving despite my emotional absence for so many years. And to my son, Aaron, whose love of learning and passion for self-growth propels me to demand the best from myself.

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Introduction

My family and I are survivors of my two life-threatening encounters with postpartum depression (PPD). After realizing that what I had been suffering from had a name and that it was unnecessary for my family and I to suffer for years, I vowed to myself that I would never let another woman go through this devastation if I could help it. It became my life's mission to educate women, their families, and health professionals about this affliction. When I started coming out of my second round of PPD in 1987, I began running PPD support groups out of my Northern California living room. (Up until that point, I taught special education and early childhood development at local community colleges.)

After making my vow to help other women and their families, I went back to school and earned a second master's degree and a PhD. Then, fueled by my passion, I went on to become licensed as a clinical psychologist. Not counting the telephone classes I have led, since 1987 I have assisted over 15,000 women in dealing with and recovering from PPD.

My guiding star for two decades now has been identifying and treating women with PPD as quickly as possible so they could begin to once again enjoy their lives and families. So, when the wise and competent folks behind the *For Dummies* series approached me to write

this book, I jumped at the chance. I knew that such a book would reach many more women than I could personally assist. And with this book, I hoped that women and their families wouldn't have to unnecessarily suffer for years — like I and my family did — from undiagnosed and untreated PPD.

About This Book

This book is intended for anyone who has PPD or thinks that he or she knows someone who has it. This includes women who have recently given birth, as well as their partners, family members, and friends. It's also a great resource for pregnant women, couples, and family members of pregnant women. In short, this book is meant for any women (and their friends and families) who may be at risk for PPD, which can be as many as one out of every five women who give birth.

However, this book isn't meant to be a medical textbook. Instead, like all *For Dummies* books, this one's meant to be an easily accessible and digestible guide that, no matter what page you turn to, can be immediately put to practical use. Even though this book isn't meant to be a textbook, my hope is that medical and mental health professionals will pick it up and benefit from what's inside (especially those who don't really believe in PPD).

The primary goal behind this book, then, is to enable you to understand the nature of PPD, and to help those

suffering from it to recover as quickly and effectively as possible. I want you to know what to expect from PPD, including how this illness tends to behave, what the general treatments look like, and how to proceed through the recovery process. Although recovery can happen quickly, it won't be overnight, so I want you to have reasonable expectations about what's likely and what's possible.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate easily through this book (because I know how scrambled your mind can feel when you have PPD), I set up a few conventions that I use consistently throughout the book:

- ✓ Anytime I want to highlight new words or terms that I define in the text, I *italicize* them.
- ✓ **Boldfaced** text is used to indicate the action part of numbered steps and the keywords of a bulleted list.
- ✓ I use monofont for Web sites and e-mail addresses.

When this book was printed, some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If you come across these instances, rest assured that I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So, when using one of these Web addresses,

just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as if the line break doesn't exist.

You'll also notice that I refer to a mom's partner quite often throughout the book. As much as possible, I used the gender-neutral reference because I fully understand the fact that nowadays many couples are same-sex parents (and a good number of the couples I've counseled are same-sex parents). Sometimes, though, being politically correct is extremely tedious in writing, so in those cases, I used the masculine form — please note that this usage was only a technicality, though, and I in no way am leaving anyone out of the picture.

Finally, if I tell you that a client or some other person told me something, you can be sure that it's exactly what he or she told me. Unlike some books discussing mental health issues, I don't use composites of clients — pulling a little bit from Client A's history, a little bit from what Client B told me, and a little bit from what I read in a journal — to illustrate a point. If I tell you that something happened to a client, it really happened.

What You're Not to Read

Everything in this book has value — otherwise, I wouldn't have written it or included it. However, you may want to skip over some parts of the book, especially if you're pressed for time or don't have a need for certain types of technical or detailed information. Helpful but

unnecessary information is usually denoted by a Technical Stuff icon or is highlighted in its own separate sidebar, which will be shaded gray.

Similarly, keep an eye out for my personal experiences, which I highlight with the Anecdote icon. This icon flags information that's extremely helpful and useful, but nonessential to your understanding of PPD.

Finally, if you're the one going through PPD, you may want to skip Chapter 16, which is intended for friends, family members, and partners of new moms suffering from PPD. On the other hand, you may actually find it useful to read about things from the perspective of those who love and know you best.

Foolish Assumptions

As any author does, I had some assumptions in my mind about you, the likely reader of this book, as I was writing it. By putting forth the following assumptions, I hope you'll feel liberated to make the best possible use of the material in this book:

- ✓ A lot of you have either been diagnosed with PPD or think that you may have PPD (or you're a family member or friend of someone who has it or who may have it).

- ✓ If you're pretty sure you have PPD, you're willing to talk to a qualified medical or mental health practitioner as soon as you can, and in any case, you won't make any kinds of major life changes or start with any kinds of medications (especially illegally obtained ones) without consulting a practitioner.
- ✓ You want to understand more about PPD, and you want an inside look at this all-too-common disorder from a trained psychology professional and from someone who intimately knows what you or your loved one is going through.
- ✓ You want to know that there's hope and light at the end of the tunnel. But, having said that, I also assume that you're ready to do what it takes to reach that light.