

How I Managed the Baby Blues

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Having a baby is a highly emotional experience with lots of highs and for some of us some significant lows. Some would even say it's stressful. With all those hormones coursing through your body it can feel like you don't have much control over your emotions.

Earlier this year my daughter was born. She's our first child and like so many new moms I thought I knew what to expect. I'd read all the blogs and books, and listened to all kinds of podcasts, but the one thing I wasn't prepared for was the emotional rollercoaster. And more specifically I didn't expect to experience baby blues.

From the days immediately following her birth, I experienced big emotional swings, from being enraged to complete apathy. Somos muy chillones en mi familia. And besides I believe you need a good cry every once in a while. But in the weeks after the baby arrived crying became a daily occurrence. I was extremely overwhelmed and experienced huge mood swings-I'd go from 0

(normal) to 10 (rage/weeping) in a matter of seconds. In the middle of the night I'd wonder why anyone would ever have a baby and swear I never wanted to have another. When my mom showed up with a pot of albóndigas and I didn't get excited, I knew something was wrong.

This was not normal for me. However, up to 80% of women get baby blues and as many as 20% suffer from postpartum depression.

My husband described me as going dark. He knew me as this strong, grounded, rational woman who knew how to ride life's waves. I'm a resilient person. But in those first several weeks after my daughter was born, I didn't know how to summon that resilience. I didn't feel like myself.

It was my husband who encouraged me to reach out to my friends and share how I was feeling. He pushed me to call my friends with kids so I could talk to someone who would understand what I was going through. And that helped, but in those moments, in the throws of motherhood I felt completely overwhelmed. It didn't take him long to suggest that I get some help and talk to a therapist.

I found a certified family counselor who specializes in transition to motherhood. My first session was at 5 weeks postpartum and it was an amazing release. I shared what I was feeling, all the emotions and frustration, the guilt, the complete sense of being overwhelmed. And at the end of the hour, I felt a great weight was lifted.

It wasn't just talking about my feelings and experience that helped. She gave me concrete and useful information that helped make sense of what was happening. She told me there are three primary drivers of baby blues, and this goes for postpartum depression too (besides the hormonal and chemical changes):

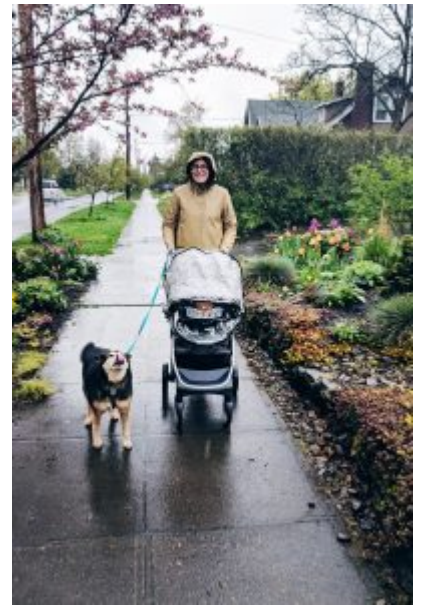
1. Sleep deprivation
2. Lack of physical activity
3. Social isolation

She told me if I could address these drivers, it would significantly help me manage my baby blues.

Sleep deprivation

This is a tough one for most parents. Some parents luck out and get those babies that sleep all the time. For the rest of us, it's 20 minutes here and there and up every hour and half at night to eat. Generally speaking, we humans need at least 5 hours of uninterrupted sleep to be our optimal selves. And for most new moms that's not happening. The common advice to sleep when the baby sleeps is great in theory, but in practice I found it nearly impossible. So suffice to say there wasn't much I was able to do early on about sleep.

Lack of physical activity



I had a c-section so by necessity I couldn't move much at all. On top of that, I had a newborn and it was cold out and I was super paranoid about germs the first 8 weeks. It wasn't until two weeks postpartum that the midwives gave me the green light to take the dogs for a two-block walk. Normally we take the dogs for two 30-minute walks a day, so my first postpartum walk around the block was amazing! I didn't care that it was raining. I was out in the world! And that short outing did wonders for my mood that day.

At six weeks postpartum I got the okay to go back to dance and that was a game changer! I took it easy during my first class back. I didn't go all out. But that one hour of being in my body made me feel like me again. Slowly but surely we got back into our regular walks and I went to dance whenever I could. I took an awesome postpartum yoga class which taught me how to re-engage my core and strengthen my pelvic floor.

Social isolation

This was the biggest one for me. I'm a very social person. I didn't realize how isolating having a newborn would be. Many people didn't know if/when it was okay to reach out or come over. They thought I was too busy or didn't want company. Nothing could be further from the truth. I needed people around. I needed to check in with friends. I needed to know what was going on outside my house.

I realized I needed to be proactive. I reached out to friends and asked them to join me on walks or meet for coffee. I let them know they wouldn't be bothering me if they texted or called on a whim.

I also shared with my friends what I had experienced with the baby blues. I let them know I needed their support and what they could do to help.

Now that my daughter is older she's sleeping up to 6 hours a night, which I never knew I'd be so excited about 5+ hours of sleep! I'm back at dance and starting to feel my strength back, but it's a journey. I'm not back to my pre-pregnancy self, and that's okay. I decided to be kind with myself. It might take a year or longer for me to feel as strong, flexible and have the stamina I had before pregnancy. The social isolation is still something I have to work on. We're the first ones in our circle of friends to have a child and so everyone is still figuring out what that means. And I realized I have to take care of me and speak up about what I need, which means being proactive about getting together with friends.



I hope my experience helps other moms. It's important we take care of ourselves so we can be the best parents. And it's also important we be kind with ourselves. I've learned to be easier on myself, foster acceptance, be more patient, find the humor and ask for help when I need it.

NOTE: If you're experiencing what you think might be baby blues or postpartum depression, please speak with your healthcare provider. This blog is simply meant to bring awareness and share what worked for me in my situation. Every situation is different. Please speak with your healthcare provider and they can provide you with resources to help.