

# 6 ways to avoid post-baby blues

As many as 70 to 85 percent of all new mothers will experience the “baby blues,” a mild change of mood beginning in the first few days after giving birth, and 10 percent will develop more severe postpartum depression (PPD), according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Here are tips to help you avoid PPD.

**1. Know your risks** Talk with your doctor if you have severe PMS, thyroid illness or a personal or family history of depression. If you experienced depression *during* pregnancy, you are at higher risk of developing PPD. “If we identify risks, we can put a treatment plan in place during pregnancy,” says psychotherapist Diana Lynn Barnes, Psy.D., president of Postpartum Support International in Woodland Hills, Calif.

**2. Eat omega-3s** Countries in which people eat more omega 3-rich seafood had a lower rate of postpartum depression, a 2002 study found. Sardines, cooked salmon, shrimp, avocados and flaxseed oil are all good sources (see pg. 44 for recommendations on fish consumption). According to study author Joseph Hibbeln, M.D., a National Institutes of Health researcher, you should get 1

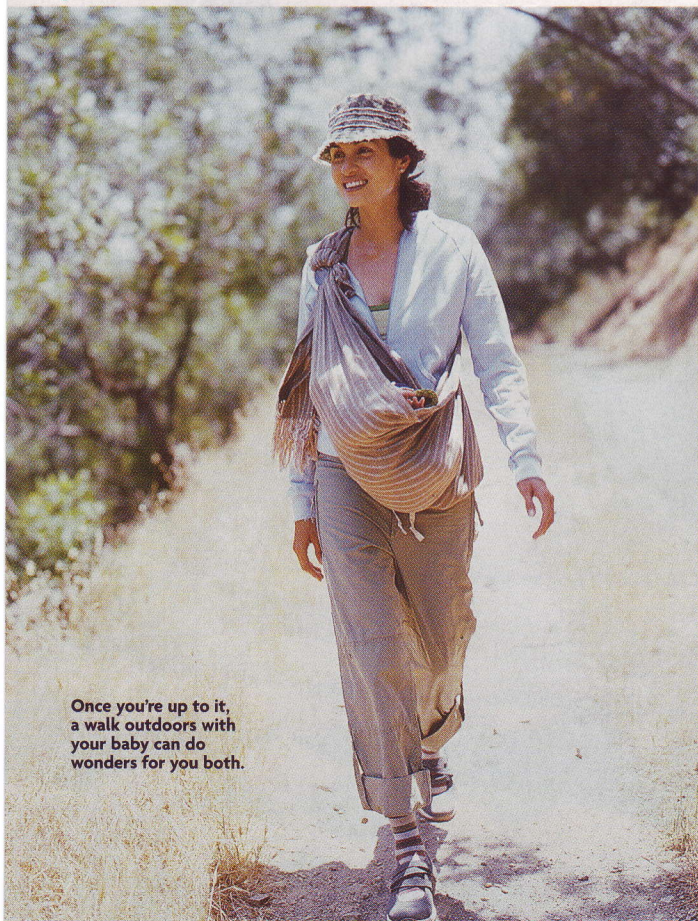
gram of omega-3s a day (3 ounces of sardines provide about 1.3 grams). Fish-oil capsules—which contain only trace amounts of mercury—also are a good way to supplement your diet, according to Hibbeln. Look for capsules that contain EPA and DHA, two essential fatty acids.

**3. Sleep** It’s tempting to catch up on daily tasks while the baby is sleeping, but don’t. “One of the major risk factors for the onset of PPD in new moms is sleep deprivation,” says Barnes. (See “Safeguard Your Sleep,” pg. 98.)

**4. Get active** “Exercise is a natural mood booster that can improve psychological health by relieving stress,” says Kelli Calabrese, M.S., a spokeswoman for the American Council on Exercise. And the company of others during exercise also helps. “Postpartum exercise classes or Mommy & Me groups that allow women to reach out to other women can be reassuring and lessen the possibility of depression,” Barnes says.

**5. Build a support team** “Develop a support network during pregnancy so you have ongoing help postpartum,” Barnes says. “Most new parents think in terms of the first couple of weeks, but I encourage women and their partners to have ongoing help for the first four to six weeks.”

**6. Plan baby-free time** “Make sure you get time alone, whether it is to practice yoga, meditate, write in a journal or even just take a bath at the end of the day,” Barnes says. “And don’t feel guilty about it.” — VANESSA GENEVA AHERN



Once you're up to it, a walk outdoors with your baby can do wonders for you both.

## (IF YOU NEED HELP)

Postpartum-depression survivor Kimberly Wong, 37, of Los Angeles knew something was very wrong when she experienced severe insomnia and a near-total loss of appetite for almost a week after giving birth. Other warning signs after the second week postpartum include feeling emotionally disconnected from or resentful of your infant, memory loss, a sense of hopelessness and severe anxiety. “Postpartum depression is a very treatable illness, but getting to it quickly is important,” says PPD expert Diana Lynn Barnes, Psy.D. “If it lingers untreated, it becomes more treatment-resistant. Women should not deny their feelings.” Here are some resources:

**POSTPARTUM SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL** can direct you to PPD support groups. 805-967-7636, [www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net).

**DEPRESSION AFTER DELIVERY** has a free information package on PPD. Phone volunteers can also direct you to PPD support groups and doctors in your area who can help. 800-944-4773, [www.depressionafterdelivery.com](http://www.depressionafterdelivery.com).

**POSTPARTUM EDUCATION FOR PARENTS** A limited-hours phone line is staffed by volunteer moms who are trained to deal with PPD. 805-564-3888, [www.sbpep.org](http://www.sbpep.org). — V.G.A.