

Information and Resources for Female Military Members and Veterans Experiencing Postpartum Depression



If you are feeling overwhelmed or want support now, call or text the **National Maternal Mental Health Hotline** at **1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)**. TTY users can use a preferred relay service or dial **711** and then **1-833-852-6262**. If you are in mental health distress or have a suicidal crisis, call or text the **Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** at **988** for free and confidential support.

Many women experience complicated emotions during pregnancy and after having a baby. It's common to feel sad, anxious, or overwhelmed. These feelings are sometimes referred to as the "baby blues." However, if you experience these symptoms for longer than two weeks after giving birth or if they feel very intense, you may have postpartum depression (PPD). Other symptoms include not feeling connected to your baby or not feeling love for your baby. Some people may experience unwanted thoughts of self-harm or harm to the baby.

PPD is common: about 1 in 8 women report symptoms of PPD in the year after giving birth. **PPD may be more common among military personnel and veterans.** However, PPD is treatable, and with professional help and personal support, healing is possible.



What factors affect military members' and veterans' risk for developing PPD?

Many factors affect a woman's risk of developing PPD including:

- Pre-existing mental health conditions such as:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Traumatic experiences from:
 - Childhood
 - Service-related training
 - Military sexual trauma
 - Combat

- Difficulty finding or keeping support from family, friends, or co-workers due to:
 - Base changes
 - Combat deployment
 - Non-combat deployment
 - Maternity leave
 - Retirement



What service related stresses can increase military members' and veterans' risk for developing PPD?

- Difficulty balancing professional duties with motherhood
- Separation from the baby for extended periods, disrupting the ability to bond and/or breastfeed
- Feelings of guilt if work takes time away from the child and from being a mother
- Hesitancy to seek help for PPD due to gender stigma within the military culture
- Feeling frightened of being passed up for professional opportunities when seeking support or treatment



What PPD symptoms and challenges can specifically affect military members and veterans?

Military members and veterans may experience overlapping symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and PPD which can include feeling:

- Detached from events or people, including your baby
- Irritable or hypervigilant
- A sense of failure, worthlessness, shame, or despair



How can military members and veterans find support and treatment for PPD?

- **Share your symptoms with a trusted health care provider** — they can connect you with resources and support, including:
 - **Therapy:** Support from a mental health professional can help you understand and cope with emotions and challenges
 - **Medication:** In some cases, medicine may be prescribed to help manage PPD symptoms
 - **Support groups:** Joining a support group of others experiencing PPD can provide information, comfort, and understanding. PPD support groups meet in person or online and may be specifically tailored to military members, such as **Postpartum Support International’s Military Moms Support Group**
- **Ask for support from your partner, a parent, a sibling, or a trusted friend.** If you don’t know where to start, ask for help with figuring out what you need and create a support plan together.
- **Practice self-care.** Taking care of yourself is important. Do your best to get enough rest, eat food with a lot of nutrients like fresh produce and whole grains, drink water, be physically active, and ask for help when needed.

General and Military-Specific PPD Resources

The resources below can connect you with additional help, treatment, and support for PPD and related mental health concerns:

- **Call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988, then press 1 or text 838255 for veteran-specific resources.** The line offers free and confidential support, even if you are not enrolled in VA benefits or health care.
- **Call or text the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline at 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262) for 24/7 free access to professional counselors.** If you’re deaf or hard of hearing, use your preferred relay service or dial **711**, then **1-833-852-6262**.

- **Visit Postpartum Support International’s Help for Military Families** page for support groups and to connect with a specialized coordinator for your branch:
www.postpartum.net/get-help/military-families
- **Call the Women Veterans Call Center at 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636)** or use their online chat feature to connect with women’s health contacts, including your local Maternity Care Coordinator or Women Veterans Program Manager, who can inform you about your benefits and assist you in getting the services you need. Call anytime Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET, and Saturday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. ET, excluding federal holidays, or visit:
www.womenshealth.va.gov/wvcc.asp
- **Reach out to the Women’s Mental Health Champion at a VA facility.** Each facility has a designated champion familiar with local VA resources for PPD. Many VA clinicians have specialized training in reproductive mental health, including PPD. The Maternity Care Coordinator, Women Veterans Program Manager, or Women’s Mental Health Champion can help veterans connect with those clinicians.
- **Visit the Military OneSource website** for information on local military treatment facilities and TRICARE: www.militaryonesource.mil. Consultants are also available by phone at **1-800-342-9647**.
- **Visit Make the Connection to watch videos** of other veterans and their loved ones discussing their experiences, mental health challenges, and recovery from military sexual trauma and postpartum depression:
www.maketheconnection.net
- **Visit PTSD Coach Online and Mobile** for tools, handouts, and videos designed for anyone who needs help with upsetting feelings — including trauma survivors, their families, or anyone coping with PTSD:
 - Online: www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/ptsdcoachonline
 - Mobile: mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach

Learn more about PPD at
www.womenshealth.gov/talkingPPD
