

Cigna Recognizes Maternal Depression Awareness Month

BLOOMFIELD, Conn., May 19, 2011 - During the month of May we celebrate and honor mothers with flowers, candy, gifts and a special day set aside just for them. But for many new mothers or mothers-to-be, **depression** makes it difficult to feel the joy of motherhood and interferes with their ability to care properly for their baby. That's why many states and Postpartum Support International have designated May as **Maternal Depression Awareness Month**.

In recognition of Maternal Depression Awareness Month, Cigna offers **online resources**, including education about [postpartum depression](#) and a [short assessment](#) people can take to see if they might be depressed.

Some of the signs of **postpartum depression** are feeling very sad, hopeless or empty; loss of pleasure or interest in daily activities; loss of appetite or losing weight; difficulty sleeping, or an inability to concentrate. These symptoms can develop in the first day following delivery or even after a couple of weeks. Postpartum depression can also occur after a miscarriage or stillbirth.

"Mothers-to-be and new mothers tend to focus on their physical well-being for the sake of their baby's health - as they should. But it's every bit as important for women to look after their emotional well-being," said Dr. Doug Nemecek, senior medical director for Cigna's behavioral health business. "Pre- or post-natal depression can be devastating for the mother, and can also have a negative impact on the entire family, so it's very important to recognize depression and seek treatment."

Approximately seven percent of women become depressed during the first trimester of pregnancy, while about 12 percent become depressed during the second and third trimesters. Prenatal stress and depression are linked to low birth weight and pre-term delivery. Approximately 15 percent of new mothers suffer from post-partum depression, but only 20 percent of them receive treatment. Eighty percent aren't diagnosed or don't get treated.

Cigna's [Healthy Pregnancies, Healthy Babies®](#) program includes screening for stress and possible depression during pregnancy, as well as two to five days following delivery and again three weeks after delivery to help to identify postpartum depression. If the screening shows the mother is at risk for depression, she is offered referral to behavioral health services. Cigna also offers a free depression screening tool on its website for physicians.

Dr. Nemecek offers these **tips** for pregnant women and new mothers:

- Keep all your medical appointments
- Review both your emotional and physical health with your doctor at each visit
- Call your doctor if you have any symptoms of depression between visits
- Work at keeping your relationship with your husband/partner a good one
- Surround yourself with understanding people who can listen to you
- Tell others how you feel
- Seek help if you continue to feel stressed or sad
- Stay informed about your condition and the risk factors for pregnant women
- Get plenty of sleep
- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- Eat properly
- Get exercise

- If your employer offers an employee assistance program (EAP), use it. An EAP is not only free to the employee, it's a great resource for coping with stress and depression, and can also help with child care resources for a new mother.

About Cigna

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