

Simple Herbs for Depression and Emotions

by Susan Perri

It's very common for a new mom to feel a wide range of intense emotions in the days and weeks following the birth of her baby. This aspect of the postpartum time can be confusing.

There are many factors that contribute to this varied experience of new motherhood:

- Shifting hormones
- Ambiguous feelings about motherhood or the baby
- A birth that didn't go as planned
- Nutritional deficiencies or anemia from blood loss
- Exhaustion, sleep deprivation from a frequently waking baby

We come from a culture where the focus and attention is immediately transferred from the pregnant mother to the new baby following birth. This sudden lapse in all of the glowing attention over the past nine months can be a rude awakening for the mother. This is paralleled by an unrealistic pressure these mothers may feel to be perfect and able to spring right back into action. Becoming a mother is a deeply layered, multifaceted experience with so many dimensions to consider. Continuing to create good and grounded support is vitally important, as is the heartfelt recognition that we are human beings with real needs and limits. Encourage mothers to be tender with themselves and their babies while they steady their footing on this path. They should take some comfort in knowing it is a well traveled one.

Early depression is usually hormonal in nature and dissipates within the first several days as the milk comes in and is established. Advise mothers to nurse often to promote a rebalancing of hormones and foster a sense of connection to the new baby. The following herbs and essences may also be helpful to new moms:

Milky oat and oatstraw (*Avena sativa*): An excellent nervous system tonic, the oat plant will help to encourage mental and hormonal balance. It has an adaptogenic quality, meaning that it adapts to the body's internal terrain and provides essential building blocks for the synthesis of the necessary or lacking hormones in the body. Mothers should use 20 to 40 drops of milky oat tincture or 3 cups of oatstraw infusion three times a day.

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*): Tasty and cooling, lemon balm is a kind of mint. It has nutritive and strengthening effects in the nervous system. Lemon balm helps to even out moods and decrease stress. Drink three cups of infusion daily.

Kava kava root (*Piper methysticum*): In extreme cases where one feels incapacitated and overwhelmed by feelings of despair or

numbness, kava kava is a powerful ally. If a mother finds herself in this category, please encourage her to seek support. Kava relieves nervousness and anxiety and helps to establish an internal sense of

well being and an ability to see the light at the end of the tunnel. The Polynesian people have long revered kava kava for its mood-lightening effects. Use 20 to 25 drops of the tincture twice daily, or 10 drops per emotional episode.

Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*): This traditional mother's herb softens the rough edges of depression and is notable as both a heart and womb tonic. "Wort" is an old-fashioned word for "herb," making this a mother's herb indeed. Mothers should use 20 to 30 drops of the tincture 3 times daily, or 20 drops per episode.

Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*): An excellent option to mellow tension and anxiety, coupled with feelings of "caregiver burnout." Moms should drink 2 to 3 cups of passionflower infusion daily, or use 20 to 30 drops of tincture. Per emotional upheaval, advise mothers to use 20 drops of passionflower tincture for its immediate calming and centering effects.

Flower Essences

Borage: For a strong heart center and the ability to meet life with optimism.

Gorse: For an even temper and a deep sense of faith and hope in life.

Zinnia: To connect with the inner child and find a sense of joyfulness and lightheartedness.

Postpartum Tea for Emotional Balance

- 1 part lemon balm
- 1 part passionflower
- 1/2 part peppermint
- 1/2 part catnip
- 1/2 part oatstraw

This tasty, uplifting herbal brew can be taken by the cupful three times a day for optimal benefits.


 Susan Perri is a clinical herbalist and founder of Blue Crescent Botanica. The information here is from her book *The Complete Herbal for Pregnancy and Childbirth*. For more on books, herbal formulas and education, visit www.bcbotanica.com.



Photo of lemon balm by Jennifer Rosenberg