Should Dads Be Screened for Postpartum Depression?

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Some researchers believe that depression among new dads is often overlooked. That's why in a new article published in the journal Pediatrics experts are calling for new fathers to be screened for postpartum depression, as is recommended for new mothers, reports Reuters.

According to these experts, recent guidelines from both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force that propose pediatricians use well-child visits to screen mothers for postpartum blues barely mention fathers, who may also suffer from postpartum depression. The mood disorder is defined as depressive symptoms during the first year after the birth of a child.

Tova Walsh, PhD, an assistant professor of social work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the article's lead author, explained that many new dads experience symptoms of depression (anywhere from 2% to 25%, according to past studies), but few know how to identify them or how to talk about their struggles. In addition, there are no clear diagnostic criteria for these men.

Symptoms in fathers vary from those of mothers, Walsh said. Besides depression, fathers may experience persistent sadness, loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities and trouble eating and sleeping. Men may also hide their difficulties by drinking more or becoming preoccupied with work.

To address the problem, Walsh and her colleagues are pushing for pediatricians to enlighten new parents about depression among men, who are often less likely than women to ask for help with this issue.

In addition, the experts said specialists should follow through with referrals to ensure new dads get treated.

"We hope the article helps raise awareness that fathers, too, struggle with depression," Walsh concluded. "Family, friends, pediatric providers and the fathers themselves have a critical role in recognizing the symptoms and getting support."

For similar coverage, read "Depression in New Moms Adversely Affects the Health of Babies and Other Family Members."

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