



PART FOUR

Coming back to Balance and Harmony

This part is about coming back to harmony and balance—regaining holistic health. The journey to feeling better begins with finding help for baby blues or depression

Healing is part of health

Most mothers who get help and support from others will recover from depression. As a woman gets better, her bad days will be fewer and will upset her less. The good days will come more often. With time, the bad days will go away completely.

Healing means moving beyond hurt, pain and disease. Healing involves setting up new patterns for living and well-being.

One of the best things a woman can do for herself is to believe that she will get better and that others can help her. This help may involve both traditional healing and western ways.

Traditional healing ways

The traditional ways teach that balance and harmony need to be found in all aspects of the “Circle of Life”—spiritual, mental, emotional and physical. The result will be a feeling of well-being.

Family, community, and cultural connections are important in this healing journey. Talking about thoughts and feelings with a trusted person is the key to dealing with those thoughts and feelings. It is OK to reach out for help. In fact, it is a sign of strength. This is difficult for a lot of people because when they reveal their true feelings, they sometimes feel exposed. They may be afraid

“Make sure you take time for yourself. Eat well—get lots of sleep.” –EW

“Not wanting to ask for help is very real. I had worries about not knowing how to parent. Remember: asking for help is strength.” –WTD

“I had to keep saying to myself ‘have faith—I will get over this.’ It was good when others said this too!” –HF

“Ceremonies—talk to an Elder (woman). Talk about it—let people know how you are feeling.” –TH

that if they open up, someone will hurt them. Elders, traditional healers, aunties, midwives, and community health workers are wise and caring people. They will listen, encourage, and counsel.

Being part of Talking Circles with other pregnant women or new mothers can help a lot. These circles may happen as support groups at health clinics, prenatal classes, Healthiest Babies Possible or other pregnancy outreach programs, the Nobody's Perfect Parenting Program, or the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program..(See Part Six—Resources for more information.)

" I had to surround myself with people who helped me to feel good about who I was AND I had to stay far away from people who made me think or feel badly of myself. It was tough at first to draw my boundaries but eventually I learned. I had to be conscious all the time about how I was feeling and what I was thinking...I had to learn to do reality checks." – YCW

Spiritual healing ways

- Create a support system of friends, family, and/or health professionals, including pregnancy or parent groups to share stories and life experience. This will help a woman's spirit grow.
- Prepare and involve your partner, friends, parents, and other family members in the day-to-day care of the baby right from the start. (See Part Five—For what partners, families, and friends can do to help.)
- Include time for "self-care" in daily routines. This is a time for a woman to do something she enjoys: going for a walk, having a bath, watching a TV show, reading, etc. It could also be time to spend with a partner or friend.
- Be gentle and use positive self-talk. (Self-talk is what you tell yourself inside your head.) Sometimes when people get depressed they say things to themselves that are unfair or negative. Try to replace these with fair and more positive thoughts. It's important for a woman to be kind to herself and remember that the Creator has given each person special gifts. She is no different!



Light - Baby looks up to Raven who is known as a creator and trickster along the Northwest Coast. Baby is guided and protected by Raven as they are interrelated through Clan lineage. The baby will grow up aware of this connection to ancestry and tradition. Raven is depicted with the Sun, known as the bearer of light to many People along the coast.

**Artists - Bracken Hanuse
Corlett and Csetkwe**

- Practice traditional or spiritual teachings. This may include prayer, smudging, brushing off with cedar or spruce, the sweat lodge, a river bath/ prayer pool, etc. A woman may also want to visit a traditional or spiritual healer, priest, or minister.
- Set up a spiritual centre in the home. For example, a woman could use a candle or a smudge bowl to burn local medicine herbs, sage, sweetgrass, cedar, spruce, or bear root when she needs to ask the ancestors and Creator for support and strength.

Mental healing ways

- Well-meaning friends and family may want to visit more often than usual and give lots of advice. Set healthy boundaries with them. A woman doesn't need to be a hostess to everyone or always take the advice that is given.
- It is important for a woman to follow her own instincts and discuss problems with someone who has experience. Consult a health care professional, such as a community health nurse, a midwife, or a doctor.
- Learn from the traditional ways, as well as from friends, books, and health care workers.
- Remember, there are no absolutely right or wrong ways to be a parent. A new mother will learn some things from people and books, and learn other things from her own experience.

- Set up a daily routine to follow, but be flexible. After the baby is born each day will be different from the next, and routines may have to change a bit.
- Plan time in the day for relaxing and doing fun things. A woman should try to do these things, even if she doesn't feel like it. Staying active makes the body feel better, uplifts feelings, and helps restore harmony.

Stages of Growth. There are 3 eagles all on one body... this shows the different stages of maturity in life... young/newborn... teenage/adolescent.. then mature adult

Artist - Gordon White

Emotional healing ways

- Keep a record of feelings by writing them down in a notebook. Once in awhile, take time to look through the notebook. This can help a woman to understand what makes her feel stressed. And, it is important for her to be aware of the progress she has made!
- A woman might need to learn how to let people know how she is feeling. Talking to others can make it easier to get through the tough times.
- Be aware that it takes time to adjust to becoming a parent. A new mother should try to be gentle with herself. She should also give herself credit for the many things she has done well and not just focus on the parts of life where she feels she "should" be doing better.
- Take some time to truly relax every day. Go for a walk. Try taking some deep breaths. Sit in a quiet room. Listen to some slow music, meditate, have a warm bath, or visit a friend. Do something enjoyable—writing, drawing, painting, beading, singing, etc.



-
- When looking for ways to relax, seek out ways that do not include alcohol, drugs, gambling, or nicotine.
 - For best results, try to find 15 to 20 minutes for relaxation with no other responsibilities. Try not to feel rushed. Good times to do this might be when other children or the baby are sleeping or when someone else is caring for the other children or the baby.
 - Remember that relaxing is like recharging a battery—it renews energy.

Physical healing ways

- Eat healthy foods, such as, dark green vegetables, seasonal fruit; whole grain breads and pastas; milk and cheeses; chicken, turkey, fish and nuts.
- Avoid sugar, caffeine (found in coffee, tea, pop, chocolate) and greasy foods.
- Drink water throughout the day. Water is a symbol in Aboriginal teachings that represents the ability to do anything we want in life—we just need to try. Water teaches this way because it goes where it freely wants to go. We, too, can flow around all barriers that get in the way of being in balance.
- Take a nap whenever possible! Nap when the baby and other children are asleep, or when someone else is looking after the children/baby.
- Exercise regularly. Try to exercise for 20 minutes at least three times a week. When the body sweats, it releases hormones that naturally relax us.
- Make exercise a pleasure not a pressure. Walk

in nature, take a local exercise class, garden or play games with children, do traditional dances, paddle a canoe, or go hiking. Maybe it's berry picking season, or fishing season...

- Choose an exercise that is enjoyable. Work up to doing it once every day.
- Go slowly. Do a little more exercise each day or choose one meal a day to begin making healthy changes.
- If used, try to reduce alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes as much as possible.

"Some days I just had to create routines and stick to them. Get up, do the housework, listen for the baby, put one foot in front of the other, go out to visit, find some laughter, rest, eat, pray, do ceremony." –YCW

Western Practices

When people suffer from depression, it is also important to use Western practices. Women who get help early will recover sooner. Western ways offer a range of treatments and helpful supports to manage depression and anxiety during pregnancy and after birth. The type of help will vary for each person. Some women have more severe depression than others. Many women find that having more than one kind of help works best. Each woman needs to find the treatment that is right for her.

The first step is for a woman to meet with a community or public health nurse, a midwife, or doctor. She can tell the healthcare worker about her symptoms, and together they can decide which approach to try. Here are some of the possible treatments.

Support

All mothers and mothers-to-be need support. The support may come from various sources – partner, family, friend and/or from professional support services.

The "Circle of Life" framework is a good guide to the different types of support that are important

for mothering. Mothers need physical support such as someone to help rock the baby or make a meal. They need emotional support, such as a good friend who listens to your concerns. Sometimes it is helpful to talk to another mother who has had depression during this time and is now better. As well, spiritual and mental health support is critical to healing.

Support groups, like a Talking Circle or Support Circle, give women a chance to share experiences. It's a safe place to get useful information and learn new ways to cope with depression and anxiety. There are different types of support groups. Some are offered by people who have also had depression at some point. Others are provided by health professionals. Community health nurses, the local health unit, or a friendship centre will know what is available in each part of the province. (*See Part Six–Resources.*)

Some women prefer to use telephone support services to talk to someone who has experience with postpartum depression and knows about the help available in the region. (*See Part Six–Resources for telephone numbers.*)

Psychological and psychosocial treatment

"You are not crazy if you talk to a counsellor." –CC

Psychological and psychosocial treatments involve what some call "Talk Therapy" as well as "counselling." In general, this is a good way to treat depression. Counsellors and psychologists can help a woman to:

- change negative thoughts and feelings
- get involved in activities
- have a speedy recovery
- prevent depression from coming back
- find ways to manage the illness and stay well.

Medications

When a woman is depressed, her body may not feel well. When depression is not treated, physical health problems often get worse. Sometimes it is hard to deal with emotional pain until the physical pain is reduced. Antidepressant drug treatments can help remove the physical symptoms of depression, reduce the length of the depression, and help people sleep better. This can improve the way a woman manages her whole life.

People may worry about the side effects of antidepressants. While it is true that there can be some side effects, they are usually minor and do not last long. Antidepressant medication is safe and does not cause addiction. However, a woman will need to decide whether or not to take any medication while she is pregnant or breast feeding. She should decide after talking to a doctor, who can help her to think about the risks and benefits to both herself and her baby.

If a woman's depression or anxiety is severe and keeps coming back, or if her regular doctor decides she needs specialized treatment, she may be referred to a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is a doctor that only treats emotional and mental illness.

Different women will take different paths to feeling better. Treatment decisions are personal, as is the journey to health.

