**FOURTH TRIMESTER PRENATAL CARE**

ACOG Bulletin 471, 496 and 518

* The time period from delivery until the six weeks postpartum checkup is sometimes referred to as the fourth trimester.
* This transitional period for the new parent(s) may be very challenging. Attention has shifted from the mother (also father and other children) to the newborn with his/her numerous needs. Maternal expectations may be unrealistic increasing the likelihood of postpartum depression.
* Emotional support from the significant other, family members, friends and health care providers is essential for sustaining the mother during this trimester.
* Mother and/or infant should be enrolled in WIC, home visiting, HANDS, Resource Persons, Family Planning, and other LHD services if applicable.

Screen/refer for risk factors (including psychosocial)

Screen/refer for domestic violence/intimate partner violence

Screen/refer for use of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use

Postpartum Blues (“Baby Blues”)

About 2-3 days postpartum, new mothers may begin to feel anxious, upset or sad. Without apparent reason, she may appear angry at the new baby, their partners and their children. This is caused by a rapid and sudden drop in hormone levels and is probably made worse by fatigue and all the other physical and emotional changes.

Other symptoms may include:

* Sudden crying for little or no apparent reason
* Difficulty eating, sleeping or making decisions.
* Feeling confused
* Feelings of inadequacy about being able to care for the new baby.

Postpartum Depression

This can occur any time after childbirth, but will commonly occur 1-3 weeks postpartum.

Women with a history of depression are at increased risk for postpartum depression. Instruct the patient to call their doctor or midwife if they experience any of these symptoms:

* “Baby Blues” that do not go away after a week or appear to worsen
* Strong feelings of anger or depression that begin 1-2 months after delivery
* Feelings of sadness, doubt, guilt or helplessness that get worse each week and interfere with normal functioning.
* Inability to care for self or the new baby
* Difficulty in performing tasks at work or home
* Changes in appetite
* Not finding interest in activities that normally brought pleasure
* Intense interest or lack of interest in the baby
* Panic attacks
* Fear of harming or being alone with the baby
* Thoughts of harming herself

Self-Care Instructions for New Mother Experiencing Depression

* Get plenty of rest. Nap when the baby is napping and let others help take care of the baby.
* Ask family and friends to help with the household tasks, your other children and tasks that they could do for you.
* Take care of yourself. Shower and dress each day. Go for a walk, meet with friends briefly, and talk with other new mothers.
* Talk with your spouse/partner, friends, family and your doctor about how you feel.
* Ask your doctor for help if you are experiencing the above symptoms.

Domestic Violence

* Domestic violence may become more prevalent in the postpartum period and therefore, screening for domestic violence should also occur at the postpartum check-up. Below are some questions that may during screening:

1. *Within the past year -- or since you have been pregnant -- have you been hit, slapped, kicked or otherwise physically hurt by someone?*
2. *Are you in a relationship with a person who threatens or physically hurts you?*
3. *Has anyone forced you to have sexual activities that made you feel uncomfortable?"*

* Refer to and complete the DV/SA -1 Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Documentation Form located in the CCSG, Forms Section. Further screening questions are available and documentation should be completed if applicable.
* Inquire about her immediate safety and the safety of the children.
* Arrange appropriate referrals.

Further References

ACOG – see [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)

Healthy Babies Are Worth the Wait resources

[www.prematurityprevention.org](http://www.prematurityprevention.org)

[www.kfap.org](http://www.kfap.org)

Edinburg Depression Screening Form

[PN-2 Level 1 Substance Use and Pregnancy Questionnaire](http://chfs.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/059DD8CD-6A25-4393-96AE-DE4B0AB7A01D/0/PN2Level1SubstanceUseandPregnancyQuestionnaire1106.doc)