New Delhi 24 May 2017: Postnatal depression is an illness that affects about 20% of mothers in developing countries like India, according to the World Health Organization. However, this kind of depression is still not recognized much. There are roughly 130 million births every year in India and provided this situation is addressed, the number or women with clinical depression is only likely to increase in the coming years.

There are many factors that trigger depression in new mothers, some of them being unplanned pregnancy, an abusive relationship, alcoholic spouse, pressures to have a male child, and hormonal changes. The symptoms of postnatal depression tend to often go unnoticed. Some of them include anxiety, crying spells, mood swings, lack of sleep, difficulty in bonding with the baby, and negative thoughts and hallucinations.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, "A majority of new mothers experience some amount of distress. This may sometimes require medical help and counseling. However, the symptoms often go unnoticed in the excitement of welcoming a baby. Postnatal depression is often accompanied by phobia and anxiety. Timely intervention can help cure 80% of such cases in a matter of 5 to 6 months. However, the remaining 20% can develop severe mental depression and other related ailments."

Postnatal depression can have other related effects as well. Stress can affect milk production in new mothers thereby hindering lactation. As a result, the baby may become irritable and not achieve adequate physical and mental growth.

Dr Aggarwal further added, "One of the major challenges in addressing postnatal depression is the lack of awareness, ignorance and social stigma surrounding this condition. A majority of women do not recognize or are unable to understand the symptom that follow childbirth. Even if they do, many are unwilling to seek medical help as psychiatric problems are not taken very well in the
Indian society even today. The need of the hour is to create awareness among pregnant women, new mothers, and the family and counsel them on how they can support the women through this phase."

Here are few things one can do as a new mother to understand and cope with their anxiety.

- Get enough rest. Tiredness can make anxiety worse and give you a constant gloomy feeling. Try catching small naps when the baby is asleep.
- Eat at smaller intervals. Low energy levels can impact mental health.
- Try not to feel guilty about not helping around the house. Understand that this is a temporary phase and it is not wrong to ask for help.
- Indulge in activities that can help you in getting distracted from any negative thoughts, such as reading a book and listening to music. Take a short walk if it helps you feel better.
- Lastly, do not compare yourself with other mothers. Each pregnancy is different and understanding this will help you feel better.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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