

A Pedicure Will Not Cure Postpartum Depression



By Julianna LeMieux — November 3, 2016



Aren't spa treatments great? Don't those women seem to be having a lot of fun?

Indeed, as wonderful as a day at the spa may be, we need to keep the benefits of a little pampering in check.

The founder of the English company spabreaks.com, Abi Wright, should be first in line for the lesson on what a day at the spa can do (relaxation) and cannot do (cure mental illness) as she promotes the benefits of spa services for the treatment of postpartum depression.

It must be made clear to her (and everyone) that postpartum depression, which affects up to one in every seven new mothers, is very different from what is referred to as the "baby blues." Baby blues are common, with up to 80% of new mothers reporting feelings of stress, sadness, anxiety, loneliness, exhaustion or weepiness and tend to dissipate on their own.

However, postpartum depression is a very serious mood disorder that cannot be lumped together with baby blues and certainly cannot be helped by any service that is offered on a spa menu.

For starters, postpartum depression does not go away on its own. The National Institute of Mental Health [website](#) ^[1] says, "With postpartum depression, feelings of sadness and anxiety can be extreme and might interfere with a woman's ability to care for herself or her family. Because of the severity of the symptoms, postpartum depression usually requires treatment." The feelings can appear days or months after delivery and can last for weeks or even months, especially if left untreated. Women who have postpartum depression report having a hard time getting through the day and difficulty in caring for their new baby. Women may have postpartum depression with any pregnancy, regardless of their history. Also, for half of women diagnosed with postpartum depression, this experience is their first episode of depression.

In order to debunk the idea that spa treatments can help with postpartum depression, we just have

to look at the cause. A day at the spa may help if postpartum depression was a behavioral response to being overwhelmed, which is a good way to think about "baby blues." But, postpartum depression is caused by something very different — the human body's physiology. After childbirth, there is a very rapid drop in the levels of the hormones estrogen and progesterone which cause chemical changes in the brain and alter mood.

No one would go to the spa to cure Cushing's disease or hyperthyroidism or any other hormonal disorder. It's equally as absurd to suggest it to cure postpartum depression.

However, that is exactly what Ms. Wright claims. She says, "The healing properties of the spa environment can be life changing for people suffering with Postnatal Depression as well as those those battling with other forms of perinatal mental health conditions."

Her ideas are backed by Elaine Hanzak , an author and motivational speaker on postpartum depression. She says, "The spa environment is ideal for healing the mind and body. The stimulating aromas; the sounds of water and restful music; the taste of exotic fruit smoothies; the soft touch from the hands of a masseur on their back or for a facial; the soft lighting in sumptuous surroundings. A new mum will more likely emerge like a butterfly from its cocoon, ready to become 'Mum' again."

Now - I am all for making it easier for a new mother to get in a little alone time and, even better, a bit of pampering. But, claiming that pleasant smells and tasty smoothies will cure postpartum depression is not only ridiculous - it is setting new mothers up with false hopes.

Let's say a new mother is having feelings of postpartum depression and she sees ads saying that a spa day will cure her of her anxiety, sadness and hopelessness. So, she scrapes together the hundreds of dollars that the massage and facial will cost, along with the cost of daycare for the hours that she will be gone. If she is breastfeeding, she pumps the milk needed for the baby, and, after all of this, takes the afternoon off. But, when she returns home, although the time away may have given her a brief rest and she may feel temporarily rejuvenated, the postpartum depression was not erased by those few hours at the spa and those same feelings of hopelessness will certainly rear their ugly head again.

There are many heartbreaking stories of mothers hurting (and even killing) themselves, their babies, or both during a struggle with postpartum depression. The possibility that women would seek help from an esthetician over a mental health professional is frightening. Moreover, the people promoting that misconception should not only be stopped but called out for scamming a vulnerable population. Selling a few pedicures is not worth misleading a mother suffering from a mental illness.

Symptoms of postpartum depression include, from the [National Institute of Mental Health website](#) ^[1] :

- Feeling sad, hopeless, empty, or overwhelmed
- Crying more often than usual or for no apparent reason
- Worrying or feeling overly anxious
- Feeling moody, irritable, or restless

- Oversleeping, or being unable to sleep even when her baby is asleep
- Having trouble concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions
- Experiencing anger or rage
- Losing interest in activities that are usually enjoyable
- Suffering from physical aches and pains, including frequent headaches, stomach problems, and muscle pain
- Eating too little or too much
- Withdrawing from or avoiding friends and family
- Having trouble bonding or forming an emotional attachment with her baby
- Persistently doubting her ability to care for her baby
- Thinking about harming herself or her baby.

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/11/03/pedicure-will-not-cure-postpartum-depression-10397>

Links

[1] <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/postpartum-depression-facts/index.shtml>