



Woman's

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders





Pregnancy and Postpartum Mental Health

Childbirth is a major event in the life of a woman and her family. You can expect to have a range of emotions. Some of your feelings may surprise you, especially if they seem negative. These negative feelings may run from mild blues to severe depression.

Many hormonal changes take place in a woman's body after the birth of a baby. These changes can affect a woman's mood, and are believed to be the cause of the "baby blues." The baby blues are weepy, sad feelings many women experience following the birth of a baby; 80 out of 100 women (80%) experience the baby blues.

Some women may experience significant symptoms of depression and anxiety that can appear anytime during pregnancy and up to one year after childbirth. These symptoms are known as Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs). PMADs, which include postpartum depression, are temporary and treatable with professional help. Perinatal and peripartum mean occurring during pregnancy and/or after childbirth. If you feel you might be experiencing PMADs, please know that you can prevent a worsening of these symptoms and fully recover with proper care.

Who is at risk?

Some factors that may put you at increased risk are:

- Depression/anxiety during pregnancy
- Depression/anxiety at some other time in your life
- Having bipolar disorder (manic depression)
- Relationship problems
- Stress about money, living in poverty
- Lack of support (family, friends, etc.)
- A "fussy" or sick/special needs baby
- Blood relatives who have had depression, bipolar disorder or postpartum depression
- Substance use
- Miscarriage, stillbirth or infant death



What are the symptoms of "baby blues"?

This is the most common reaction for women. It usually starts on the second or third day after the birth and lasts around 10 days.

Common symptoms are:

- Anxiety (nervousness, worry, feeling stressed)
- Crying spells
- Fear of being alone
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Not sure how to be a good mother
- Feeling lonely
- Mood swings

What are the symptoms of peripartum depression?

About 1 out of 7, or about 15%, of women develop depression, which may start during pregnancy or may take several weeks and even up to a year after childbirth to develop.

Common symptoms are:

- Irritability
- Anxiety (nervousness, worry, feeling stressed)
- Guilt
- Sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness or emptiness
- Trouble sleeping, even when the baby sleeps
- Lack of interest in the baby
- Feeling like you are not a good mother
- Feeling like you should never have become a mother
- Scary thoughts about the baby
- Feeling like you do not want to eat
- No energy

What are the symptoms of peripartum anxiety?

About 6 out of 100 pregnant women (6%) and 10 out of 100 postpartum women (10%) develop anxiety. Anxiety can happen with or without depression.

Common symptoms are:

- Worry or feeling that something bad is going to happen
- Panic attacks (could include shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness, feeling of losing control, numbness and tingling)

What are the symptoms of postpartum posttraumatic stress disorder?

Approximately 9 out of 100 women (9%) experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following childbirth. This condition can be caused by a difficult or traumatic childbirth.

Common symptoms are:

- Flashbacks or nightmares
- Feeling of anxiety and the need to avoid things related to the event
- Being on high alert or "on guard"

What are the symptoms of peripartum obsessive-compulsive disorder?

It is estimated 3-5 out of 100 women (3-5%) will have symptoms of OCD. Symptoms may include scary thoughts of harming yourself or the baby. It is far more likely the mother will take steps to avoid what they fear because the thoughts upset them.

Common symptoms are:

- Repetitive, upsetting and unwanted thoughts or mental images
- Doing certain things over and over to reduce fears/anxiety
- Thoughts that may be "strange" or very scary



What are the symptoms of bipolar mood disorders?

Women may be diagnosed with bipolar disorder for the first time after delivery. In addition to the symptoms listed for peripartum depression, postpartum women might have periods of high moods and dramatic mood swings.

These include:

- Being really excited or easily aggravated
- Needing less sleep than usual
- Racing thoughts (thoughts come to you very fast and you cannot stop them)
- Trouble focusing
- Getting more things done than usual
- Very fast speech
- More energy than usual

What are the symptoms of postpartum psychosis?

Psychosis is a rare illness involving your thoughts and senses. Less than 1 out of 100 women (less than 1%) have postpartum psychosis. In rare instances, these symptoms may appear as early as the first 48-72 hours after birth or within the first four weeks after delivery, or when weaning from breastfeeding.

These include:

- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that no one else can see or hear)
- Paranoia (thinking people are out to get you)
- Delusions (beliefs that do not make sense to others)
- Behavior not normal for you
- You cannot sleep
- Not spending time with family members

Mothers may also experience:

- Suicidal thoughts
- Thoughts of harming her baby

Postpartum psychosis is an emergency and requires immediate help. If you have any of these symptoms, go to the nearest emergency room.

Self-Care

Remember, you are not alone, you are not to blame, and with help, you will feel better.

Here are other actions you can take to help yourself:

- Care for yourself with healthy food and rest
- Mild exercise such as walking, dancing or yoga can be helpful after your doctor clears you
- Develop a support system such as an exercise class, neighbors, church members, friends or family members
- Talk to at least one adult daily about how you are doing
- Allow yourself to express both negative and positive feelings
- Remember your sense of humor/laughter
- Avoid any major decisions until you are feeling better
- Take at least 10 minutes of quiet time for yourself daily
- Find a relaxing activity you enjoy, such as taking a bath, reading or listening to music



When self-care isn't enough

If things seem to be getting worse despite your efforts, do not wait to get help. There is no reason to continue to suffer. Seek help right away from your doctor. He or she may suggest a check-up, medication or therapy with a professional who is trained to help you. Many women put off calling the doctor because they feel guilty or don't want to be seen as "crazy." Your doctor has seen many other women in the same situation and will help you feel better. Remember, PMADs are common and treatable and you are not alone.

When to seek immediate help

You need to call your doctor immediately if you experience any of these symptoms:

- Fear you may hurt yourself or your baby
- Have hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that no one else can see or hear)
- You do not feel able to care for your baby or other children

Who to call? Where to go?

- Your doctor
- The nearest hospital emergency room
- The National Suicide Prevention Hotline:
1-800-273-8255

Fathers and Other Caregivers

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders affect the whole family. Did you know that 1 out of 10 males suffer from postpartum depression? As a father, partner or caregiver, you should remember to take care of yourself along with the mother and baby in your life. Ask for help. Use the tips in this booklet as a guide.

How you can help her:

- Encourage her to talk about her feelings and listen without judgement
- Provide support and comfort
- Care for the baby so she can get some sleep
- Do not leave her alone until you are told by a doctor that it is all right to do so
- Be sure that healthy food is available
- Take care of household chores

Other Resources

Integrated Care for Woman's

Call 225-924-8584

Woman's Social Services

Call 225-924-8456 for other information.

Postpartum Support International

1-800-944-4PPD

Postpartum.net

Postpartum Dads

postpartumdads.org

Postpartum Stress Center

postpartumprogress.com

211

louisiana211.org



Woman's

Founded in 1968, Woman's is a nonprofit organization, governed by a board of community volunteers, providing medical care and services in order to improve the health of women and infants, including community education, research and outreach.

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womans.org

