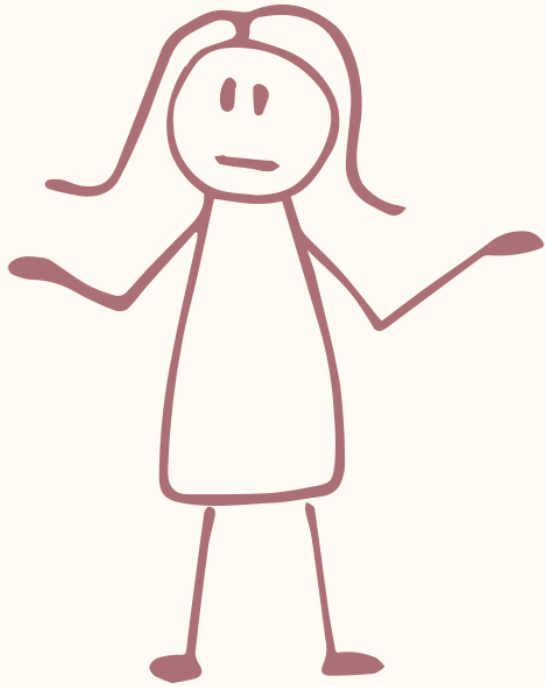


# Pregnancy and Postpartum

## Mental Health Illnesses (PMADs)



Up until recently, we labeled EVERYTHING postpartum depression. But, this can be confusing because postpartum depression might not accurately describe your symptoms and feelings. We now say Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders or PMADs (perinatal meaning the time during pregnancy and up to one year after delivery) because **postpartum depression is not the only mental health illness affecting women during pregnancy and postpartum.**

## Prenatal (or Antenatal) Anxiety and Depression

Symptoms for maternal depression and anxiety can start anytime during pregnancy and up to 20% of women experience some form of depression, anxiety, or both while pregnant. It's NOT "normal" to have panic attacks during pregnancy, to have multiple nights of insomnia, to have such extreme worry about yourself and/or your baby's health that you are calling your OB multiple times a month, or feeling the need to purchase your own monitor on Amazon to listen to your baby's heartbeat each and every day.

### SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- You feel sad and can't stop crying.
- You have no appetite.
- You can't sleep.
- You can't find joy or pleasure in things you used to.
- You worry constantly.
- You often feel like something bad is going to happen.
- You have racing thoughts ("what if" thoughts).
- You have panic attacks.
- You can't sit still.
- You have feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- You're scared to leave your home.
- You feel hopeless, like this will never ever get better.
- You feel irritated or angry.
- You have no patience. Everything annoys you. You feel resentment toward your baby, partner, friends.
- You feel out-of-control rage.

- You feel nothing and are just going through the motions.
- You can't concentrate. You can't focus. You can't think of the words you want to say. You can't remember what you were supposed to do. You can't make a decision. You feel like you're in a fog.
- You can't seem to delegate or ask for help with anything.
- You have intrusive scary thoughts or images of something bad happening to your baby.
- You feel overwhelmed, like, "I can't do this and I'm never going to be able to do this." In fact, you may be wondering whether you should have gotten pregnant in the first place.
- You feel like your baby deserves better. You may wonder if your baby would be better off without you.
- You're afraid that this is your new reality and that you've lost the "old you" forever.
- You have physical symptoms, like dizziness, hot flashes, racing heart, excessive sweating, and nausea.

# Postpartum Depression

1 in 5 (more than 800,000) women experience postpartum depression (considered the #1 complication of childbirth) each year.

## SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- You don't feel bonded to your baby.
- You have no interest in your baby.
- You feel sad and can't stop crying, even when there's no real reason to be crying.
- You can't sleep when the baby sleeps, nor at any other time. Or maybe all you can do is sleep and you can't stay awake to get the most basic things done. Either way, your sleeping is completely screwed up and it's not just because you have a baby.
- You have no appetite.
- You can't find joy or pleasure in things you used to.
- You feel overwhelmed. Not like, "Hey, this new mom thing is hard." More like, "I can't do this and I'm never going to be able to do this." You may be wondering if you should have become a mother in the first place.
- You feel irritated or angry.
- You have no patience. Everything annoys you.
- You feel resentment toward your baby, or your partner, or your friends who don't have babies.
- You feel out-of-control rage.

- You feel nothing and are just going through the motions.
- You feel lonely, isolated, and hopeless, like this situation will never ever get better.
- You feel weak and defective, like a failure.
- You can't concentrate. You can't focus. You can't think of the words you want to say.
- You can't remember what you were supposed to do. You can't make a decision. You feel like you're in a fog.
- You're afraid that this is your new reality and that you've lost the "old you" forever.
- You feel like your baby deserves better. You worry whether your baby can tell that you are crying so much. You may even wonder whether your baby would be better off without you.
- You have intrusive scary thoughts or images of something bad happening to your baby.
- You may be having thoughts of running away and leaving your family behind or possibly, of harming the baby or yourself. Maybe you've thought of driving off the road, taking too many pills, or finding some other way to end this misery.

# Postpartum Anxiety

While the available statistics say approximately 10% of postpartum women develop anxiety, clinicians who work in this field day after day will tell you that 8 out of every 10 women present with anxiety (also considered the number one complication of childbirth) as their leading symptom.

## SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- You feel like something bad is going to happen.
- You have racing thoughts ("what if" thoughts).
- You have panic attacks.
- You can't sleep when the baby sleeps, nor can you sleep at any other time.
- You notice changes in your appetite and might feel unable to swallow.
- You can't sit still.
- You feel overwhelmed. Not like, "Hey, this new mom thing is hard." More like, "I can't do this and I'm never going to be able to do this."
- You ARE able to take care of your baby, go to work, do all the things – but you feel like you are suffering on the inside, while on the outside everything looks all good.
- You have physical symptoms like dizziness, hot flashes, racing heart, excessive sweating, and nausea.
- You feel irritated or angry. You have no patience. Everything annoys you.

- You feel out-of-control rage.
- You have trouble making decisions because everything feels like the wrong answer.
- You never feel reassured when friends or family try to help or you're unable to ask for or even accept help.
- You can't concentrate. You can't focus. You can't think of the words you want to say. You can't remember what you were supposed to do. You can't make a decision. You feel like you're in a fog.
- You have a fear of driving – alone or with your baby.
- You fear leaving your home.
- You feel trapped in your own home and experience an increase in anxiety when at home with your baby.
- You don't want to or you aren't even able to be alone with your baby.
- You have intrusive scary thoughts or images of something bad happening to your baby.
- You have passive suicidal thoughts. (Thoughts that start with, "The baby would be better off if I wasn't here").

# Postpartum OCD

3-5% of women will experience postpartum OCD. Moms with postpartum OCD know that their thoughts are upsetting, strange, and not okay. There is very little risk they will act upon them.

## SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Obsessions, also called intrusive thoughts, which are persistent, repetitive thoughts, or mental images related to the baby. These can also be called scary thoughts, are very upsetting, and most likely not something you have ever experienced before.
- A sense of horror about the obsessions.
- Compulsions, where you may do certain things over and over again to reduce your fears and obsessions – like cleaning constantly, checking things over and over, or counting and reordering things.

- Fear of being left alone with your baby.
- Fixation on the safety, health, and functioning of the baby (for example, baby's sleep schedule, baby's weight gain, baby's milk or formula intake, baby's milestones, how much breastmilk you're producing, your pumping schedule, SIDS, constantly checking if the baby is breathing, fearing germs, not letting anyone else hold the baby because they are "not clean"). These moms take every word that they read or a pediatrician says very seriously – usually keeping exhausting records on an app, or in a notebook.
- Hypervigilance in protecting your baby.

# Postpartum PTSD

Approximately 9% of women experience postpartum post-traumatic stress disorder, a form of postpartum anxiety, following childbirth and typically caused by a real or perceived trauma or what was a perceived threat during labor, delivery or postpartum. It can be as simple as unmet expectations and as frightening as a near death experience.

## SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Intrusive re-experiencing or re-living of the past traumatic event (which in this case may have been the childbirth itself)
- Flashbacks or nightmares related to the event, many of which can be brought on by one of our five senses. For example, a mom who had a postpartum hemorrhage that resulted in her baby being admitted to NICU could be functioning at a normal level all day. But, when she goes to the hospital to visit the baby, parks in the same parking garage, enters the hospital using the same door, and smells the hospital smells, she can become overwhelmed and experience PTSD symptoms.

- Avoidance of stimuli associated with the event, including thoughts, feelings, people, places, and details of the event
- Persistent increased arousal (irritability, difficulty sleeping, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle responses)
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Sudden episodes of intense negative feelings
- Feeling a sense of unreality and emotional detachment
- Distraction from taking care of baby because of constant thinking about the event

# Postpartum Bipolar

Approximately 30% of bipolar diagnoses occur in the postpartum period. In postpartum women, a bipolar depression can look just like a very severe depression or might be experienced as anxiety. The criteria for a diagnosis of a bipolar mood disorder is that the symptoms last longer than four days, interfere with functioning and relationships, and are more intense than the moodiness of postpartum.

## SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Periods of severe depression
- Periods when your mood is much better than normal
- Rapid speech
- Little need for sleep
- Severe anxiety
- Irritability
- Racing thoughts

- Trouble concentrating
- Continuous high energy
- Overconfidence
- Paranoia
- Impulsiveness, poor judgment, and distractibility
- Grandiose thoughts such as an inflated sense of self-importance
- In the most severe cases, delusions and hallucinations

# Postpartum Psychosis

A much less common illness compared to postpartum depression and anxiety, occurring in 1-2 women per 1000 women after childbirth, occurring very suddenly, and usually within the first days to weeks postpartum. Psychosis lies to you and makes you believe your strange thoughts. Psychosis is a **MEDICAL EMERGENCY** and needs to be treated **IMMEDIATELY** in a hospital setting. It's important to note that many survivors of postpartum psychosis do not have delusions containing violent commands or harm themselves or anyone else.

## SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Delusions or strange beliefs (often religious in nature)
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't there)
- Hyperactivity
- Decreased need for or inability to sleep
- Paranoia and suspiciousness
- Rapid mood swings
- Difficulty communicating at times
- Having moments where it seems like you can see or hear things no one else does
- Feeling paranoid as if others are out to get you
- Feeling that you or your baby are related to the devil or God in some way
- Having thoughts of harming yourself or others

## A note about intrusive thoughts

Scary thoughts that are negative, repetitive, and unwanted thoughts, usually focused on some type of harm or accident coming to your baby, that can come out of nowhere and hit you at any time. It's been reported that more than 90% of new moms experience intrusive thoughts.

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO KNOW

- Intrusive thoughts are treatable and respond very well to medication and therapy.
- They are a very common symptom of postpartum depression and anxiety.
- They may race through your head during the day and/or prevent you from falling asleep at night.
- They can come in the form of thoughts (what if I drop the baby down the stairs) or images (the baby actually falling down the stairs).
- They can be passive (I'm afraid I might take one of the knives in my kitchen and stab the baby) or active (I can picture myself driving off the road with my baby in the car).
- They can be part of a postpartum OCD diagnosis and may be accompanied by compulsive behaviors.
- If you have a history of OCD or consider yourself a worrier, overly analytic, or a perfectionist, you could be at an increased risk.
- These thoughts may make you feel guilty and ashamed, but it's important to remind yourself, you are not a bad mother or going crazy. Your brain is playing tricks on you and it's the anxiety talking.
- Feeling worried about and horrified by your thoughts is exactly what defines them as what they are: intrusive thoughts, and not actual desires.

## AND REMEMBER...

The postpartum period technically lasts for one year after delivery, but we say it doesn't matter when or how long after delivery it's been. If something feels wrong, you feel like you are not okay, and are worried about your mental health, it's important to see a professional right away.



Disclaimer: The information provided here is not medical advice. It is for education only. If you or someone you know is experiencing depression or anxiety during pregnancy or postpartum, contact the Postpartum Support International Helpline at 1.800.944.4773. If you are thinking of harming yourself or your baby, get help right away by going to the nearest ER, calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1.800.273.8255, or dialing 911.