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New Beginnings, New Challenges: Prioritizing Postpartum Mental Health

You are not alone.





What is postpartum?

- Postpartum mental health refers to the emotional and psychological well-being of a mother after childbirth. This period can be challenging as new mothers navigate the physical recovery from childbirth, hormonal fluctuations, sleep deprivation, and the demands of caring for a newborn. These factors can lead to a range of mental health conditions that affect a mother's ability to bond with her baby, take care of herself, and feel emotionally stable.
- Postpartum mental health conditions are common and can affect anyone, regardless of their previous mental health history. It's important for new mothers to seek help if they experience emotional distress during the postpartum period. Support from healthcare providers, family, and friends is essential for recovery and maintaining well-being.

What are the Types

Baby Blues: This is a common and mild condition experienced by many new mothers. 4 out of 5 women will experience baby blues. Symptoms include mood swings, crying spells, irritability, and anxiety. Baby blues typically occur within the first two weeks after childbirth and usually resolve on their own.

Postpartum Depression (PPD): Unlike baby blues, postpartum depression is more severe and lasts longer—often beyond the first two weeks. It can cause deep feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and exhaustion. PPD can interfere with a mother's ability to care for herself or her baby and may require professional treatment, such as therapy or medication.

Postpartum Anxiety: This involves excessive worry and fear, often about the baby's well-being or the mother's ability to care for the child. Symptoms can include racing thoughts, physical tension, and panic attacks. Postpartum anxiety can occur alongside postpartum depression or on its own.

Postpartum OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder): New mothers may experience intrusive, repetitive thoughts or urges, often related to harm coming to their baby. While the thoughts are distressing, the mother usually recognizes they are irrational. Compulsive behaviors, such as excessive checking or cleaning, can accompany these thoughts.

Postpartum Psychosis: A rare but severe condition that typically requires immediate medical attention. Women who have bipolar disorder may be at higher risk. Symptoms include confusion, sleep disturbances, hallucinations, delusions, extreme mood swings that change rapidly, confusion and distrusting others. Postpartum psychosis is a medical emergency and requires immediate intervention.

Trauma or Birth-Related PTSD: Some mothers may experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after a traumatic childbirth experience. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares, or intense feelings of fear or helplessness.

Postpartum rage: Postpartum rage is an intense feeling of anger, aggression and irritability. It can occur simultaneously with postpartum depression or anxiety.

Who is likely to experience it?

- 1 in 7 woman are likely to experience postpartum during or within the first year of childbirth.
- High risk Factors: Women who are already in a stressful environment at the time of pregnancy or birth are like to experience postpartum symptoms.
 - examples include: history of depression or anxiety, history of sexual abuse, high risk pregnancies, traumatic events during childbirth, lack of social support, young maternal age, financial struggles, domestic violence victims, work stress and family history of psychiatric disorders.

Common misconceptions

- Many people believe that if a mother experiences postpartum depression (PPD), it's because she isn't bonding with her baby. However, PPD can affect mothers who have a strong bond with their child. The condition is caused by a combination of hormonal changes, sleep deprivation, stress, and other factors, not a lack of love or connection with the baby.
- 1 in 7 women will experience postpartum depression, and many more experience anxiety, mood swings, or other mental health challenges during the postpartum period. It's important to recognize that these conditions are more widespread than most people realize. This misconception can create guilt or shame for new mothers who experience negative emotions after childbirth. The reality is that the postpartum period is often challenging physically, emotionally, and mentally. It's normal to experience a range of emotions, and struggling doesn't mean you're ungrateful or a bad parent—it means you may need support.
- There's no "right" timeline for recovery from childbirth. While some women feel better relatively quickly, others may need more time to heal physically and emotionally. If a mother is struggling, it's important not to put pressure on her to "snap out of it" or expect that she should be feeling better after a specific period.

Reminders to tell yourself

- **The symptoms are temporary**, though it's important to seek help even if you think it's not severe. Any support during this time is crucial.
- **Rest when you can** – Sleep may be broken, but naps and downtime help healing.
- **Stay hydrated** – Especially important if you're breastfeeding.
- **Eat nourishing foods** – Your body is recovering and possibly producing milk.
- **It's okay to cry** – Hormones shift rapidly, and mood swings are common.
- **Ask for help** – Don't hesitate to lean on loved ones.
- **Watch for signs of PPD** – If sadness, anger, or anxiety become overwhelming or persistent, talk to someone. Postpartum depression is common and treatable.
- **You're still you** – Your identity may feel different, but you haven't lost yourself.
- **You're allowed to take breaks** – A 10-minute walk, a shower, or just some silence helps.
- **It's okay if breastfeeding is hard** – Or if you choose formula. Fed is best.
- **Don't compare** – Every baby and every journey is different.
- **Bonding takes time** – If love isn't instant, it doesn't mean you're doing it wrong.
- **You're not “bouncing back,” you're healing.**
- **You deserve grace, not pressure.**
- **Your body is strong. Your emotions are valid. Your baby loves you.**

Mantras to tell yourself

When you feel overwhelmed:

- *“I don’t have to do it all. I just have to do the next thing.”*
- *“It’s okay to pause.”*

When you feel disconnected or like you're "not yourself":

- *“This version of me is new.”*
- *“I am becoming, not disappearing.”*
- *“It’s okay to grieve who I was and still love who I am becoming.”*

When you're feeling anxious or like you're not doing enough:

- *“I am enough for my baby, even when I feel unsure.”*
- *“My baby doesn’t need perfection—just me.”*
- *“The fact that I care means I’m already doing great.”*

When emotions come in waves:

- *“Feelings are visitors; they come and go.”*
- *“I can feel this and still be safe.”*
- *“Crying doesn’t mean I’m weak. It means I’m human.”*

For daily grounding:

- *“I trust myself, even when it’s hard.”*
- *“I deserve kindness—especially from myself.”*

When intrusive thoughts occur:

- *“Just because the thought crossed my mind, doesn’t mean I’ll act on it”*
- *“My thoughts don’t define how I feel about my baby”*
- *“These thoughts feel scary to me, that’s a good sign”.*