

POSTPARTUM PSYCHOSIS

What is it?



Postpartum psychosis is a rare but serious mental health condition that can occur after childbirth, most *often* within the first days to two weeks postpartum.

It affects a person's sense of reality and requires **immediate medical attention**.



What Are the Signs & Symptoms?

Symptoms of postpartum psychosis often come on quickly and may feel very different from the person's usual self.

Changes in Thinking & Perception

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- Hearing, seeing, or sensing things others do not
 - Strong beliefs that feel very real but are not based in reality
 - (e.g., feeling chosen for a special purpose, or that something bad is about to happen)
 - Racing, disorganized, or hard-to-follow thoughts
 - Difficulty concentrating or making sense of things

Changes in Mood

- Rapid shifts in mood (high energy → low mood → anxiety)
- Feeling unusually “high,” energized, or invincible
- Or feeling deeply low, fearful, or overwhelmed
- Intense irritability or agitation

Changes in Behaviour

- **Sleeping very little** or not at all, without feeling tired
- Acting out of character or unlike their usual self
- Withdrawing from loved ones or becoming suspicious of others
- Talking very quickly, or not making sense when speaking
- Difficulty caring for themselves or the baby

Changes in Awareness

- Appearing confused or disoriented
- Not recognizing familiar people or surroundings
- Seeming “not like themselves” in a way that feels concerning



IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- These symptoms can worsen quickly over hours or days
- The person may not realize anything is wrong
- This is why early recognition by family and support people is so important

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Who Is at Higher Risk?

DIAGNOSIS	OTHER RISK FACTORS	APPROXIMATE RISK
No history of mental illness	No immediate family history of postpartum psychosis	1 in 1000
Bipolar disorder type I or Schizoaffective disorder	No immediate family history First pregnancy	1 in 5
Bipolar disorder type I or Schizoaffective disorder	Mother or a sister who has had postpartum psychosis	1 in 2
Bipolar disorder type I or Schizoaffective disorder	2nd pregnancy - no postpartum psychosis in 1st pregnancy	1 in 10
Bipolar disorder type I or Schizoaffective disorder	Previous postpartum psychosis	1 in 2
Previous postpartum psychosis		1 in 2

Cite: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/mental-illnesses-and-mental-health-problems/postpartum-psychosis>



POSTPARTUM PSYCHOSIS IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY: CALL 911

Individuals at **higher risk** may be referred to community-based wraparound supports, even if they are **not** currently experiencing symptoms, to help ensure early intervention and ongoing care.



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When to Seek Help



If you or someone you love is presenting with symptoms of postpartum psychosis it is a medical emergency.

!!! CALL 911!!!

Paramedics can support with safe transportation to the hospital.

Early intervention is important.

If someone has risk factors it is important to:

- Discuss risk factors with the entire health care team including: the primary care provider, Obstetrician, Midwife and or other birth workers
- Share with other people who can be part of your support plan
- Develop an emergency plan, so if symptoms become present, your support people know who to call and what to do.
- Connect with a perinatal psychiatrist who can assist with monitoring and providing medication (if needed)



**Postpartum psychosis is not anyones fault.
Support is Available**

Please note Maternal Health Niagara is not here to provide medical advise. We refer individuals with risk factos to community based services for a full assessment and treatment plan