



Center for Anxiety *and* Behavior Management

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5 Ways to Deal With Perinatal Mood & Anxiety



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While many people have heard the term “Postpartum Depression,” few are familiar with the range of disorders that may actually occur during the perinatal period. Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) can begin anytime during or after pregnancy. These can range from depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder, and psychosis. Onset is within the first year postpartum. Initial symptoms may merge with what we typically refer to as the “baby blues,” which occur within the first 2 weeks after birth, or it may be triggered later amid hormonal shifts and increased life stressors. Those with preexisting depression, anxiety, or mood disorders, in addition to those who are more susceptible to hormonal changes are more likely to be affected. Stressors including sleep deprivation, marital/relationship strain, financial difficulties, poor nutrition, inadequate support, and cultural barriers can contribute to increased risk for PMADs. It is important to remember at least 1 in 7 women experience significant depression or anxiety during pregnancy or during the postpartum period. In reality, this number is most likely higher because these disorders have been vastly underreported due to a history of stigma surrounding postpartum mental health issues. While these symptoms may be overwhelming and even scary, the good news is that they are temporary and treatable! In addition to finding a therapist trained in evidence-based treatment of PMADs, there are a few things that individuals and families can do to ensure support and assistance during the perinatal period.

Signs of PMADs

Feelings of Isolation

Worry & Panic

Sadness

Intrusive Scary Thoughts

Feeling Out of Control

Exhaustion

Sleeping Difficulties

Under- / Overeating

Intense Rage or Anger

When is it time to get help?

You're experiencing any of the following:

~frequently feeling down, sad, or depressed

~loss of interest, joy, or pleasure in things

~difficulty concentrating or feeling mentally "foggy"

~slow moving, fatigue, lethargy, lack of energy or motivation

~irritability or agitation

~intense anger or rage

~constant worrying, anxiousness, or hypervigilance

~appetite change

~sleep disturbances

~feelings of shame, guilt, or hopelessness

~obsessive thoughts

~compulsive behaviors

~delusions, hallucinations, feeling disconnected from reality

5 Ways to Deal With Perinatal Mood & Anxiety (cont'd)

1. Come up with a postnatal plan: Identify your support team and their roles. Delegate tasks such as delivering food, helping with laundry, assisting with care of older children, etc. (Note: this looks different during a pandemic but can be modified to provide support in safe and effective ways.)

2. Prioritize sleep and nutrition: Prior to birth, get as much rest as possible and focus on getting adequate hydration and nutrition. Gather menus for local restaurants that provide take-out/delivery of healthy and nutrient dense options. After the baby arrives, parents should focus on sleeping in shifts, aiming for at least 4 hours of uninterrupted sleep per parent.

3. Set up self-care routine: Make time for things that are important to you. Schedule time for exercise (when medically cleared), reading, watching your favorite show, showering, etc. Discuss this with your partner ahead of time and come up with a code word or phrase to let each other know if you are feeling overwhelmed and need a break. This allows you to take time without having to explain your feelings in the moment. Circle back to have a conversation with your partner after you have had a break.

4. Be flexible: Expect that things will not necessarily go according to plan - and that is okay! Parenting books, advice from others, educational videos, and the internet can all be great resources; however, every baby is different and there is no one theory, strategy, or plan that will fit your child and your lifestyle perfectly. Take each resource cautiously and modify to use different approach as needed.

5. Reconsider your relationship with social media: Seeing others' experiences of the perinatal/postpartum period through filtered lenses can be extremely damaging. It sets up impossible expectations and can lead to feelings of failure if your experience does not match what you see on the screen. Only follow accounts that provide joy or consider taking a break from social media altogether.

Please keep in mind that **dads and partners can also experience postpartum depression and anxiety!** Like moms, dads and partners can face the following:

- disengagement from the baby
- fear of caring for the baby alone
- hypervigilance, overly worried, or on edge
- sleep disturbances
- anger, rage, or irritability
- mood swings
- feeling overwhelmed

If you're having a difficult time with implementing these strategies, struggling with overwhelming thoughts or feelings, or in need of more information, please feel free to contact us, and we'd be happy to assist you.

