

What are perinatal mood and anxiety disorders?

Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are mood disorders that affect women during and up to one year after pregnancy. There are many illnesses that fall into this category including perinatal depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychosis. Visit www.healthynewmoms.org for information on each of these.

Perinatal depression

Perinatal depression is a mood disorder that can affect women during and after pregnancy. Mothers with perinatal depression experience feelings of extreme sadness, anxiety and exhaustion that may make it difficult for them to complete daily care activities for themselves or others.

The condition, which occurs in ten to fifteen percent of births, may begin shortly before or any time after childbirth, but commonly occurs between a week and a month after delivery.

There isn't a single factor that causes perinatal depression, but it is likely the result of several physical and emotional factors. During pregnancy and after childbirth, the levels of hormones (estrogen and progesterone) in a woman's body quickly change. This change in brain chemicals can cause mood swings.

“I wondered what the symptoms were. I was a high risk pregnancy, but no one ever said anything about perinatal depression.”

Symptoms can include:

- Insomnia
- Difficulty focusing, staying on task or making decisions
- Feelings of worthlessness, guilt or shame
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Prolonged crying
- Overwhelming fatigue
- Intense anger or irritability
- Severe mood swings
- Difficulty bonding with baby
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Loss of interest in sex
- Thoughts of harming self or baby
- Recurrent negative thoughts of death, suicide plans or attempts

Perinatal anxiety

Perinatal anxiety can cause recurrent feelings of intense worry or panic. Anxiety symptoms usually appear during pregnancy or in the first two to three weeks after the birth of a baby, but may not reach a distressing level until several weeks later. There is some overlap between depression and anxiety, and some women have symptoms of both. Some women with perinatal anxiety have recurrent fears about harm coming to their children, other loved ones or themselves.

Symptoms can include:

- Constant worry
- Feeling that something bad is going to happen
- Racing thoughts
- Disturbances of sleep and appetite
- Inability to sit still
- Physical symptoms like dizziness, hot flashes and nausea

Treatment

It is important to know that there are many effective treatments for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. Some common forms of treatment and self care strategies include:

- Therapy from a mental health professional, ideally someone who specializes in treating perinatal mood and anxiety disorders
- Social support including peer and therapy support groups, support from family and friends
- Self care strategies like getting enough sleep, exercise and healthy eating
- Medication prescribed by a professional who specializes in treating perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. There are many medications that are safe to take during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. **It is important to talk with your health care provider before you stop and/or start any medications.**

“I don't know what I would have done without my support group.”

Start by talking to:

- OB/GYN, Midwife, etc.
- Primary care physician
- Child's pediatrician
- Your friend, a family member or someone you feel comfortable talking with
- Local or national social support organization geared toward helping new moms with this common complication of pregnancy

Visit www.healthynewmoms.org for information on local resources including support groups, partner and family help, insurance information and more.



“I am so glad I sought treatment. Our entire family's life has improved. I was finally able to enjoy being a mom.”

What if these disorders are untreated?

Without treatment, perinatal mood and anxiety disorders can last for months or years. In addition to affecting the mother's health, these disorders can interfere with her ability to connect with and care for her baby, and may cause the baby to have problems with sleeping, eating and behavior and/or development as he or she grows, as well as affecting the family's overall health.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, or thinking of suicide, get help quickly.

**24 hour hotline in Maryland:
1-800-422-0009**

*“I looked forward to having a baby,
but didn’t realize how tough it would be.
There’s no ‘out’ now.”*

Having a new baby can be a joyous occasion but can also be very stressful. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the “baby blues” is a term used to describe the feelings of worry, unhappiness and fatigue that many women experience after having a baby.

Baby blues, which affects up to 80% of mothers, includes feelings that are somewhat mild, last a week or two, and tend to go away on their own.

Up to 15% of new moms experience something beyond the baby blues called perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. These conditions cause feelings of sadness and anxiety that can be extreme and might interfere with a woman’s ability to care for herself or her family. Because of the severity of the symptoms, these disorders usually require treatment.



Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders can affect any woman, regardless of age, race, ethnicity or economic status. It is important to note that these disorders are common and help is available.

Having a baby can feel isolating at times. If you are struggling with depression and/or anxiety, you may feel even worse.

Talk to someone! You are not alone.

Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth. Treatment can make a big difference, but most women don’t seek the help they need. If you are worried, anxious and/or not sleeping, talk to someone today.

Friends and family are often the first to notice when a mom may be struggling. If you think a mom you know needs help, reach out and help connect her to resources.

Healthy New Moms is a program of the Mental Health Association of Maryland with support from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene - Behavioral Health Administration. Healthy New Moms aims to raise awareness of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders and offer support and resources to moms, families and providers across the state.

To learn more, please visit www.healthynewmoms.org



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