



A NEW MOTHER'S *emotions*

Your guide to understanding
maternal mental health


York Region



*It is not your fault
It is treatable*

Understanding Maternal Mental Health

Life with a new baby is not always easy and the adjustment to parenthood can be challenging for new moms and their families. Anxiety, depression and other mood disorders during pregnancy and after the arrival of a baby are a reality for many expectant and new moms.

These can affect mom's:

- Physical health
- Emotions
- Actions
- Relationships
- Baby

It can happen to any family. It is not your fault. It is treatable.

Risk Factors

- Depression or anxiety during pregnancy
- Previous history of depression or other mental illness
- Family history of mental illness
- Lack of help or support
- Relationship or family conflict
- Stressful life events
- Financial stress
- Unwanted/unplanned pregnancy
- Baby with special needs
- Fussy baby

Facts

Symptoms

Moms may have some or all of the following symptoms

Baby Blues

Affects up to 80 per cent of new moms

- Occurs within the first three to five days after birth
- Goes away within one to two weeks
- Are normal feelings following the birth of a baby

If symptoms do not go away after two weeks, it may be a sign of something more serious. It is important to seek help. Talk to your health care provider.

- Cries for no apparent reason
- Feels irritable or oversensitive
- Feels a bit anxious
- Has lots of mood changes
- Is happy most of the time

Postpartum Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders and depression often happen together. Most common types:

- Panic disorder
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder

Anxiety can get worse if not treated early. It is important to seek help. Talk to your health care provider.

- Has panic attacks: pounding heart, shortness of breath, sweating, shaking, chest pain and upset stomach
- Experiences feelings of dread
- Excessively worries about everything
- Feels jittery, irritable, cannot focus and has muscle tension
- Has repeated inappropriate thoughts about baby or self
- Has repetitive behaviours or rituals
- Has persistent disturbing memories, nightmares or flashbacks about traumatic event(s)
- Feels numb
- Avoids people, places or events that remind her of the trauma

Facts

Symptoms

Moms may have some or all of the following symptoms

Postpartum Depression

- Affects 15 to 20 per cent of new moms
- May start suddenly or slowly
- Can occur any time within the first year after baby's birth or during pregnancy
- **Depression can get worse if not treated early. Talk to your health care provider or call a crisis line.**

If you have thoughts about death or suicide, call 911 or your local crisis line.

- Has a low mood most of the time
- Loses enjoyment in regular activities
- Is sad most of the time
- Feels inadequate, guilty, worthless or hopeless
- Feels angry, irritable or resentful
- Has difficulty sleeping
- Has low energy or feels agitated
- Has no appetite or overeats
- Finds it difficult to concentrate
- Fears for her baby and/or fears being alone with her baby
- Has thoughts about death or suicide

Postpartum Psychosis

- Rare, occurs in one to two per 1,000 births
- Rapid onset (within hours) and symptoms appear within three days to four weeks after birth
- Risk increases with previous history of postpartum psychosis and/or bipolar disorder

This is a very serious mental health condition that requires urgent attention and treatment. Call 911 for immediate help.

- Hallucinates, hears voices or sees things
- Has thoughts of harming herself or others
- Has paranoid thoughts that someone is trying to harm her and her baby
- Is not able to sleep or eat
- Unusual behaviour



You will get better

What can moms do?

Get help! Call your health care provider to talk about how you are feeling. Delaying treatment can delay recovery.

Ask for support. It is okay to have help taking care of your baby and yourself. Choose someone you can talk to who is patient and caring.

Take care of yourself. Sleep when baby sleeps, eat well and get some exercise.

Take breaks. Take time to be by yourself. Take a bath, read a magazine or go for a walk.

Get counselling. There are many professionals who can help you to talk through your feelings.

Consider medications. Antidepressants are not addictive. Talk to your doctor about what is right for you. You can continue to breastfeed while taking certain medications.

Delay major decisions. Wait until you are feeling better so you can concentrate and think through problems.

Be patient. It takes time for recovery. Remember, there is hope.

You will get better

If you know someone who is living with a mood disorder you can help:

- Be patient
- Listen
- Provide breaks
- Support decisions to seek help
- Watch for signs of medical emergency
- Provide emotional support by letting her know that her concerns are real and that you will be there



You are not alone

PUBLIC HEALTH

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