

Introduction

For most women, pregnancy and birth are a time for celebration. However, this is a time of change in a woman's body and lifestyle, which may increase the risk of poor mental health.

When a family welcomes a new baby it can be challenging both physically and emotionally. During the transitional stage of bringing a baby home mood swings are natural from feeling overjoyed one minute to stressed/ overwhelmed the next. Sometimes these feelings are referred to as "baby blues," and tend to go away a few weeks after the birth of the baby.

However, some parents may experience a deep and ongoing depression that lasts much longer. This is called postpartum depression.

A new mother/ father might not recognize depression or anxiety as she is tired, overwhelmed or simply adjusting to life with a new baby.

What is Postpartum Depression (PPD)?

Postpartum depression may start during pregnancy or at any time up to a year after the birth of a child. New moms are not the only ones at risk for a postnatal mood disorder! Studies show that PPD peaks at 4 YEARS postpartum. Make the PPD checklist a part of your regular routine: once every 1-2 week for new moms (and dads- yes it can effect dads as well 1 in 10 in Ontario) for the first year postpartum and once a month for families with toddlers.

Depression impacts a person's mood and the way a person feels. Mood impacts the way people think about themselves, relate to others, and interact with the world around them. This is more than a "bad day" or "feeling blue."

Signs of depression include feeling sad, worthless, hopeless, guilty, or anxious a lot of the time. Some feel irritable or angry. People lose interest in things they used to enjoy and may withdraw from others. Depression can make it hard to focus on tasks and remember information. It can be hard to concentrate, learn new things, or make decisions.

Depression can change the way people eat and sleep, and many people experience physical health problems.

A mother or father with postpartum depression may not enjoy the baby and have frequent thoughts that they're a bad parent. They may also have scary thoughts around

harming themselves or their baby. Although it's rare for a parent to make plans to act on these thoughts, this situation is serious and requires urgent medical care.

What's the Difference between Baby Blues and PPD

The adjustment! Having a new baby brings physical, emotional and social changes.

Many will feel:

- Sad/ tearful
- Irritable
- Exhausted
- Overwhelmed
- Difficulties with eating and sleeping
- Loss of interest in normal activities

A lot of the same symptoms of depression and THIS IS NORMAL. However if it goes on longer than 2 weeks it is time to seek help from a professional.

Postpartum Mood Disorders

MAY LOOK LIKE THIS:

1. You tell everyone you are feeling great and they believe you. You are up early, you try to look perfect and get back into shape. The house is spotless and so is the baby. But you wonder how long you can keep this up. Inside you feel like a totally different person.

2. You don't feel like yourself at all. You can't get your head off the couch or the bed. You can't seem to take care of yourself and you don't even care if you do. You can barely take care of the baby.

3. You thought you would fall in love with your baby, but instead the baby scares you. How can you look after and love this helpless baby. You don't want to take care of him/her or you pass him/her to dad or other family members. You sometimes think the baby would be better off without you.

4. You can't enjoy the baby, because you are always worrying about her/him. Is her/ his diaper clean? Is she/he getting sick? What if you dropped her/him, if she/ he slipped from

your hands in the bathtub? What if she/ he stopped breathing? You are constantly checking her/ him, you can't even sleep and you are not letting anyone else look after her/ him. You are getting more and more exhausted but you can't stop worrying.

5. You are feeling so irritable. You get angry at the least little thing. No one can do anything right, folding the laundry or changing the baby. Something did not get done the way you want it done. You know your family and friends are tiptoeing around you so not to upset you, but you just can't stop getting angry.

What causes PPD?

Postpartum depression is likely caused by many different factors that work together, including family history, biology, personality, life experiences, and the environment (especially sleep deprivation). Another component could be how you react to the hormonal changes happening in your body. Sometimes, the things you have to face every day just get on top of you. PPD can also affect families who adopt. Certain circumstances may make it harder for you to cope, such as:

- History of depression, either during pregnancy or at other times
- History of bipolar disorder
- Postpartum depression after a previous pregnancy
- Family members who've had depression or other mood stability problems
- Stressful events during the past year, such as pregnancy or delivery complications, illness or job loss
- Your baby has health problems or other special needs
- Difficulty breast-feeding
- Relationship problems with spouse or significant other
- Lack of a support system; not having a supportive partner, or not having family/ friends living close by
- Financial difficulties
- Difficulties with housing
- The pregnancy was unplanned or unwanted
- A discrepancy between your expectations of labour, birth, parenthood, breastfeeding and the reality
- Sad memories being stirred up ex. Loss of parents as a child

****Please note you don't need to have these factors to experience PPD. Having these factors in your life don't mean that you will get PPD, either.**

What can I do about it?

Postpartum depression can be a very difficult experience. Becoming a new parent is hard enough and the challenges added by depression can seem overwhelming. It's important to remember that there is no such thing as a perfect pregnancy, perfect birth, perfect baby, or perfect parent. You are doing the best you can. And with care and support, you can recover and enjoy time with your family.

- **Do not blame yourself.** You are not alone in feeling the way you do. Do not feel ashamed or guilty for your thoughts and feelings. They do not make you a bad mother.
- **Ask for help.** Talk to your partner, family, friends and health care provider. Do not be ashamed of your feelings. Delaying help may delay recovery.
- **Self- Care.** Take care of yourself. Try to rest, eat healthy foods and get some fresh air and exercise.
- **Take time for yourself.** Accept offers for help with household chores and baby care so you can have a break.
- **Get counseling.** Attend one-to-one counseling sessions or join a support group with other parents; it is helpful to talk through your feelings in a safe and supportive environment.
- **Consider medication.** Your health care provider may recommend medication that is safe to use while breastfeeding and is not addictive

Self- Care

Taking care of your well-being is especially important, but this can be difficult for any new parent. It may be helpful to recruit loved ones or see what services may be available so you can take some time for your own needs. Regular exercise can boost your mood and help you manage stress. Eating well and sleeping as much as you can are also very helpful. And it's always important to spend time on activities you enjoy, find relaxation strategies that work for you, and spend time with people who make you feel good.

(For more information on self- care check out the blog on www.pieceofmindcounselling.com, or on our Facebook page under Piece of Mind Counselling).

If you think you may cause harm to yourself or your baby, it is important you get help right away. Help is available through:

- Local Emergency Department
- Mobile Crisis of Peel -24 hours-905-278-9036 Caledon: 1-888-811-2222
- Distress Line Peel -24 hours- 905-278-7208
- Spectra Community Support Services Distress Line- 905-459-7777

Other services available:

- Motherisk Helpline proudly sponsored by Shoppers Drug Mart 1-877-439-2744; 416-813-6780
Provides evidence-based information about the risk or safety of prescription and over-the-counter medications, herbal products, chemicals, radiation, chronic diseases, infections, occupational, environmental, and other exposures during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.
- Peel Postpartum Family Support Line 905-459-8441 • 289-298-5468 (Caledon) 10am-10pm Services available in English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin and Cantonese.
- Adjustment After Birth Peer Support Groups Ontario Early Years Centres PMD in Peel Website pmdinpeel.ca
- Piece of Mind Counselling. Individual, Couples and Families Psychotherapy and Counselling Services. 647-993-6617, www.pieceofmindcounselling.com