

maternal mental wellness

Knowledge is only potential power. *Applied* knowledge is where the magic happens. Take charge of your mental health by knowing what perinatal mood disorders are, acknowledging if you are predisposed & monitoring your mental health on a regular basis.

perinatal mood disorders

DEPRESSION.

A type of clinical depression that occurs in individuals after childbirth. Both parents can be affected, although the condition occurs more frequently in mothers than partners. It may be misdiagnosed as the baby blues at first, but the symptoms are more severe, last much longer and can occur well past the first few weeks postpartum.

ANXIETY.

Anxiety is an adaptive response that we feel when we feel unsafe or threatened. This feeling can occur in women after giving birth. Symptoms include: increased heart rate, feeling of impending doom, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, tightness in chest, ruminating thoughts, excessive worry, difficulty sleeping, inability to shut brain off, over-protective behaviour and hyper-vigilance around danger.

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER.

OCD is defined by recurrent obsessions (repetitive thoughts, ideas, mental images) and/or compulsions (repetitive behaviours the individual is compelled to perform in order to ease the anxiety created from the obsession). In post-partum OCD, unwanted, intrusive thoughts usually are associated with the baby and compulsive behaviour is also directed towards the child (e.g. avoiding feeding the child for fear of poisoning; throwing out objects that could harm the child).

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS.

9% of women will experience post-partum post-traumatic stress disorder and is precipitated by real or perceived trauma during labour and delivery. Symptoms include flashbacks/nightmares of the trauma experienced, re-experiencing of a past traumatic event, anxiety, panic attacks and avoiding stimuli associated with the trauma.

BIPOLAR DISORDER.

Bipolar disorder is defined by periods of "highs" or mania and "lows" or depression. In the manic phase, the affected individual has extremely high energy, fast speech, insomnia (but there is little need for sleep), racing thoughts, delusions, grandiose thoughts and in some cases hallucinations. In the depressed phase the individual can experience low mood, irritability or severe depression. Postpartum bipolar disorder is rare but has an increased chance of occurring in mothers with a pre-existing mood disorder or if there is a family history of bipolar disorder.

PSYCHOSIS.

This occurs in 1-2% of new mothers and is defined by the rapid onset of paranoid, grandiose or bizarre delusions, grossly disorganized behaviour, hallucinations, mood swings and confused thinking, which is a dramatic change from previous functioning. This change can occur within 2-3 days after childbirth. Having a pre-existing mental disorder increases the risk of developing post-partum psychosis.

prescreening

Besides the few questions your doctor may ask you, true pre-screening isn't regulated into our healthcare system during the prenatal period, it's up to us to gain understanding and be proactive with our mental health.

are you predisposed?

- A previous history of perinatal mood or anxiety disorder such as postpartum depression (PPD), anxiety or psychosis.
- Depression or anxiety during a current pregnancy.
- A previous history of depression or bipolar disorder.
- Family history of mental illness including depression or bipolar disorder.
- History of pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD).
- Previous miscarriage or stillbirth.
- Difficulty conceiving, difficult pregnancy and/or delivery.
- Previous traumatic birth experience (PTSD).
- New baby has reflux such as colic or reflux.
- Poor support from partner, family and friends.
- Difficulty managing existing children's needs.
- Parent of multiples.
- Being a single parent.
- Experiencing a recent trauma or stressful event such as: domestic violence, verbal abuse, poverty, loss of a loved one, divorce or financial difficulties.

If you or a loved one answered 'yes' to one or more of the above, it's a good idea to create a postnatal recovery plan, including a support team.

recovery plan & support team brainstorming:

postpartum mental wellness scale

Use this checklist to help you monitor your mental health status in the postpartum period. Record the number that best describes the frequency that you experience the following symptoms.

0 = Never **1 = Sometimes**
2 = Often **3 = Always**

Green Zone

Some of these thoughts will naturally occur during the first 6 weeks. Be aware if they are persistent throughout your day and continue week after week. **Values:** 0-12 & 13-24 monitor closely & talk to someone, 25-26 seek help.

	DATE		
I can't sleep, even when baby is sleeping			
I am experiencing headaches and/or migraines			
I feel short of breath			
I am overwhelmed by my thoughts			
I can't sit still or relax			
I feel like I am "losing it"			
I feel that other people think I am failing			
I want to be alone			
I don't enjoy things like I used to			
I feel numb and disconnected			
I don't feel like I am bonding with my baby			
I don't feel "in love" with my baby			
TOTAL			

Yellow Zone

You may naturally experience some of these these thoughts or feelings, however they tend to be less common and should be monitored closely. **Values:** 0-12 & 13-24 monitor closely & talk to someone, 25-26 seek help.

	DATE		
I feel sluggish, like I'm dragging myself around			
I feel weighed down			
I have no appetite			
I feel a constant "pit" in my stomach			
I have been experiencing stomach aches and/or back aches			
I feel like I can't focus or concentrate on anything			
I feel anxious and/or worried			
I feel sad and I cry for no apparent reason			
I feel like I am not good at this "parent" thing			
I'm having trouble getting out of bed			
I don't feel like socializing			
I feel overwhelm			
TOTAL			

Red Zone

These symptoms are severe and require immediate medical intervention. Please do not hesitate to seek help, or attempt to manage them on your own. **Values:** 1-39 seek help immediately.

	DATE		
I am experiencing panic attacks			
I am having scary thoughts that include harming myself, my baby or others			
I have SERIOUS thoughts about harming myself, my baby or others			
I feel like a failure and that my baby would be better off without me			
I feel like a burden and that my family would be better off without me			
I self-medicate with alcohol, drugs or other substances			
I feel like I am hearing or seeing things that other people do not see or hear			
I think that other people want to hurt me and/or my baby			
I feel low, tearful, hopeless, empty inside			
I feel anger and rage that I have never felt before			
I feel anger and/or resentment towards my baby			
I am afraid to be alone with my baby			
I wish that I didn't have a baby			
TOTAL			

