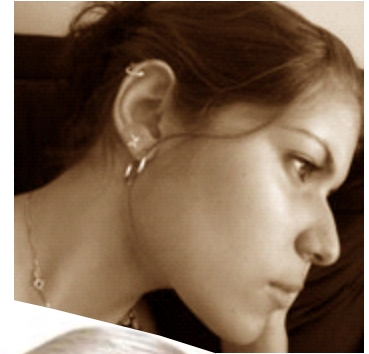


Mental Health and New Mothers— About Postpartum Depression and Psychosis

"I was crying every day and unable to enjoy or care for my baby in the way that I wanted to."

Feeling 'Not Yourself' After Having a Baby

Post partum depression is a relatively common depression (up to 15% of new mothers) occurring in the first few weeks or months after birthing. It is caused by a combination of social, economic, psychological and body/hormonal changes new mothers experience.



Some symptoms of postpartum depression and anxiety include:

- ◆ crying spells
- ◆ feeling helpless or inadequate
- ◆ sleeping difficulties
- ◆ despair
- ◆ loss of appetite
- ◆ feelings of resentment
- ◆ anxiety and panic attacks
- ◆ intense worry about the baby or lack of interest in the baby



In rare situations (1-2 births in every 1000 women) a woman will also develop psychosis, a treatable illness of the brain. Women who have experienced other mental illnesses are particularly at risk, but a woman who has no family or personal history of mental illness can also become ill with psychosis.

When psychosis is involved, in addition to the above symptoms, the new mother may:

- ◆ feel that something is 'not right' or that she is 'not herself'
- ◆ have thoughts of harming the baby or herself
- ◆ find it difficult to organize her thoughts or speech
- ◆ behave in a bizarre manner
- ◆ hear voices that seem real but aren't
- ◆ begin to hold unusual, strongly held beliefs that don't fit with the evidence.

"The day after delivery I felt strange... I felt overwhelmed with worry. My heart was beating rapidly. I felt frightened. I thought people were talking about me and trying to harm me!!!"

Mental Health and New Mothers About Postpartum Depression and Psychosis

Continued...

What is Psychosis?

Psychosis is an illness of the brain that makes it difficult for a person to tell the difference between what is real and what is not real.

A new mother with psychosis may feel 'not herself', have difficulty organizing her thoughts, see things that others do not see, hear voices or sounds that seem real but are not. She may have thoughts of hurting herself or her baby. These symptoms can be very frightening, but help is available. The sooner she receives treatment, the smoother her recovery will be.

If a new mother has these symptoms she needs to get to her doctor, or if that is not possible, the emergency department immediately.

How to Get Help

If you or a new mother you know is experiencing symptoms of depression or psychosis, it is important to get help. If you recognize these symptoms in yourself or someone else, please contact your doctor, a public health nurse, local mental health centre (1-800-661-2121), psychiatrist or midwife right away.

Treatment may involve medication and support and may include a hospital stay for the mother and baby until symptoms improve.



For More Information

BC Reproductive Mental Health Program—This program is based at BC Women's Health Centre and St. Paul's Hospital and serves women BC-wide who have mental health difficulties connected to childbearing. The website contains information and resources on postpartum depression and postpartum psychosis. www.bcwomens.ca

BC Schizophrenia Society—Provides information on psychosis for people with mental illness and their families. www.bcscs.org



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