

THE MOTHERHOOD CENTER *of New York*

Learn About PMADs

The Motherhood Center aims to educate, diagnose and treat moms/birthing parents suffering from perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) otherwise, known as postpartum depression.





About PMADs

PMADs (pronounced P-Mads) is a clinical term for what most people refer to as “postpartum depression.” It includes several symptoms that mothers/birthing parents can experience after a baby is born. What isn’t talked about enough is that these same symptoms can also happen during pregnancy. In fact, 50% of all PMADs develop while a woman is pregnant.



So why isn’t anyone talking about how hard it is to become a new parent?

When you have a baby, people say things like, “Enjoy this amazing time with your new baby – it’s the best time of your life!” Or “you must be so happy!” Well... what if it’s not amazing? What if you are not brimming with joy? What if new parenthood feels bad? It’s ok to say, “This is really hard,” because it is! There is no right or wrong way to feel about becoming a mom, whether it’s for the first time or the third!

What are the “baby blues?”

Nearly 80% of all new mothers/birthing parents experience the “baby blues,” which can feel like a rollercoaster of emotions—feeling happy one minute and tearful the next, stressed, exhausted, and overwhelmed.



1 in 5 new or expecting moms will develop a PMAD.

While most new mothers experience the “baby blues” for up to 2 weeks postpartum, lingering, or intensified feelings of sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, or debilitating anxiety about caring for baby that continue beyond the 2-week mark may suggest a perinatal mood or anxiety disorder.

If you notice these symptoms in yourself or a loved one, it may be due to a PMAD.



What to know about PMADs

PMADs include the following:

Perinatal (meaning during pregnancy and/or postpartum) depression; anxiety; obsessive-compulsive disorder; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); and, in the most severe cases, psychosis. A woman experiencing these more intense symptoms may have difficulty bonding with her baby, convince herself that she is not a good parent, or worry that she doesn't love her baby enough. These feelings can be distressing; however, treatment is available and can help moms feel better.



Why are PMADs important?

- 1 in 5 women experience a PMAD in the perinatal period.
- 50% of PMADs develop during pregnancy.
- 80% of cases go undiagnosed and untreated because of shame and stigma.
- PMADs are the #1 complication associated with childbirth.
- PMADs are the leading cause of maternal mortality.

How do I know if I have a PMAD?

There are several ways to determine whether the symptoms you are experiencing may be a PMAD:

Your symptoms continue after the initial 2-week postpartum period.

You are having difficulty completing daily tasks, you notice tension or strain in your relationships, and/or you are having difficulty connecting with your baby.

You score above 12.5 on a screening tool called the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) provided by your OB/GYN, PCP, or pediatrician.

Your symptoms feel so distressing that they are taking up most of your mental space and consuming your day.



What does **perinatal depression** feel like?

Perinatal depression can make you feel like you are drowning in a big sea, fighting to keep your head above water. It can make you feel ashamed, guilty, and lonely.



Symptoms include the following:

- Low mood, sadness, and/or tearfulness.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy.
- Feelings of agitation and rage.
- Feelings of hopelessness and/or helplessness.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Not being able to fall asleep or stay asleep.
- Having a decreased appetite.
- Guilt, shame, or the feeling that having a baby was a huge mistake.
- Wanting to escape or not be here anymore.

What does **perinatal anxiety** feel like?

Perinatal anxiety can make you feel like your mind is a hamster wheel or merry-go-round of endless, circling fears and worries. These anxious thoughts escalate from zero to 100 almost immediately (e.g., “If my baby doesn’t take a 2-hour nap three times a day, then he will struggle, and I will be exhausted, and I won’t be able to take care of him, and then he’ll be taken away from me.”). You may also find it difficult to control or stop these thoughts.

Symptoms include the following:

- Anxiety, panic attacks, or obsessive thoughts.
- Rumination about your baby’s health and well-being.
- Difficulty controlling worries/thoughts.
- Violent, intrusive thoughts about harm coming to you or your baby.
- Irritability or exhaustion, physically and emotionally.
- Difficulty sleeping even when the baby is cared for or sleeping.
- Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank

What does **perinatal OCD** feel like?

Perinatal OCD can bring a constant barrage of scary, unwanted thoughts or images which results in fear or worries about your role as a caregiver or the safety and wellbeing of your child.

Intrusive thoughts include the following:

- Worry that you will hurt the baby by dropping or throwing them.
- Fear that you will accidentally cause harm to the baby through carelessness.
- Anxiety that you will unintentionally expose the baby to toxins and chemicals or a serious illness.

To alleviate these thoughts and images, you may engage in repetitive behaviors, include the following:

- Not feeding the baby for fear of poisoning them.
- Not consuming certain foods or medications out of fear of harming the baby.
- Obsessively checking the baby while he/she sleeps.
- Asking family members for reassurance that the baby has not been harmed or abused.

What does **perinatal Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** feel like?

Perinatal PTSD can make you feel like you are continuously experiencing a trauma, which puts your body in a constant state of fight or flight, making you feel constantly on guard or panicked.

Perinatal PTSD may develop following traumatic labor or childbirth. Additionally, new moms may feel overwhelmed by motherhood which activates past traumas.

Symptoms Include the following:

- Having nightmares, flashbacks, or distressing recollections of the event.
- Feeling hypervigilant or on guard or feeling easily irritated or on edge.
- Feeling restless or having difficulty sleeping.
- Feeling numb.
- Avoiding people, situations, conversations, or places that remind you of the trauma.



What does **perinatal psychosis** feel like?

Perinatal psychosis is rare. However, if you or someone you know may be experiencing symptoms of perinatal psychosis, **THIS IS A MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY** that warrants a visit to the nearest emergency room.

Postpartum psychosis can make you feel like you're living in an alternate reality—that things are suddenly not what they seem.

You may experience the following:

- Develop strange beliefs that feel real but are not.
- See or hear things that aren't there.
- Feel confused, disorganized, or disconnected from reality.
- Experience a decreased need for sleep.
- Feeling paranoid or suspicious.
- Have difficulty communicating at times

Where can you find support?

The best first step is to get evaluated by a perinatal mental health specialist. A perinatal mental health specialist has expertise in treating PMADs and understanding the complexities of how PMADs impact the transition to motherhood. An evaluation will provide information about which PMAD you may be experiencing and the most appropriate treatment options for your specific concerns. Treatment may include individual therapy, group therapy, couples or family therapy, and/or medications that are safe and effective for pregnancy and breastfeeding.

“It can be hard to ask for help. But the sooner you do—the sooner you will feel so much better!”



Resources

The Motherhood Center of New York (TMC) offers weekly support groups, individual therapy, couples/family therapy, and medication management. TMC also offers a Day Program for women who may need more intensive care. For more information, please visit www.themotherhoodcenter.com, or call 212-335-0034. TMC treats new and expecting moms/birthing people with PMADs in New York and New Jersey.

Postpartum Support International (PSI): PSI's mission is to promote awareness, prevention and treatment of mental health issues related to childbearing in every country. For more information, please visit <https://www.postpartum.net>

