

Getting The Help You Deserve: Baby Blues vs. Perinatal Mood & Anxiety Disorder

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Every new mom deserves to get proper support. This is true if it is her first child or a new addition to the family. Entering motherhood is difficult. Mood swings, lack of sleep, irritability, anxiety, and feeling low are all common experiences. Known as baby blues, this is part of your body adjusting to chemical changes, a change in your routine and the many new emotions that come with being a parent. Baby blues usually clear up on their own within a few weeks.

For some moms, their experience goes far beyond baby blues. It is estimated that 20% or more of moms experience what we commonly call postpartum depression. We have learned how pregnancy-related hormones impact a woman's physical and psychological well being. We now know it is much more than just feeling depressed. In fact, some moms don't feel depressed at all. Some may feel highly anxious, be unable to sleep, experience dramatic mood changes, or become hyper aroused. The truth is, it looks different for each woman. And, depending on the woman, these symptoms can start from in the beginning of pregnancy or months after the baby is born. Thus, what was once referred to as postpartum depression has now been broadened to perinatal mood and anxiety disorder (PMAD).

Perinatal mood and anxiety disorder hits hard right when a woman is at a vulnerable time in her life. What if they think I'm crazy? What if I really am a bad mom? What if they take my baby away? These are common thoughts women may experience. It can feel impossible to get through the day. It can also feel shameful and scary to talk about, especially in a society where moms are expected to be happy and cheerful once their bundles of joy arrive. Often women don't say anything, and doctors don't always ask. Up to half of all woman who struggle with mental well-being during pregnancy never receive the support they need.

The good news is that perinatal mood and anxiety disorder is treatable. Therapy, support groups, treatment planning, and in some cases, medication, can go a long way to alleviate many of the symptoms associated with PMADs. PMADs are much more manageable with support.



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If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, consider speaking with your doctor:

- Thoughts of harm to yourself or your baby
- Feeling severely depressed, distressed, or hopeless
- Feelings of paranoia, nonstop worry, or panic attacks
- Feeling profoundly disconnected to your baby
- Obsessive and compulsive thoughts you are unable to control
- Severe sleeplessness or restlessness, even when your baby is sleeping
- Inability to eat
- Feeling overwhelmed in a way that interferes with daily life

Getting support as early as possible benefits mom, baby and family. If you feel like you're experiencing more than baby blues, talk to your OB-GYN or pediatrician. If you feel uncomfortable going to those people, reach out to a trusted friend or family member, talk to your partner, call your advice nurse or reach out to one of the resources listed at the end of this article. Health care should not only focus on your physical health. Your mental health will affect your baby just as much as your physical health.

Reaching out for help and putting yourself on a path towards wellness is a triumph. Do it for yourself. Do it for your baby.

Postpartum Support International - 800-944-4773

Call their warmline to leave a confidential message and they will return your call.

Institute for Girls' Development - 626-585-8075

We have mental health clinicians on staff to support you. We offer assessments, individual and group support and can help link you to other resources in your area.

Maternal Mental Health Warmline - 831-783-5933

Free confidential bilingual counselors will return your call, listen to your concerns, offer a postpartum screening, and help you connect with the right local resources.

Medical Disclaimer: This content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.

