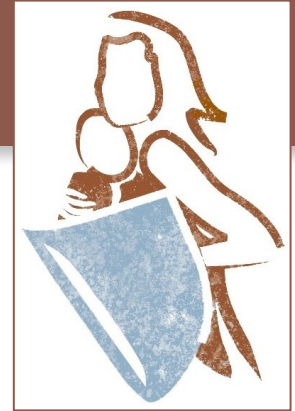


# Plain Mama English

from *Postpartum Progress*®



## *The Symptoms of Postpartum Depression & Anxiety*

What does it feel like to have **postpartum depression** or **postpartum anxiety**? What are the signs or symptoms? How do you know when you have it? And if you do have it, what should you do? We're happy to explain, in plain mama English, using words that make sense. When you read the two different symptoms lists below, **one for postpartum depression and the one after it for postpartum anxiety and OCD**, please remember a few very important things:

1. You may not have all of the symptoms listed or even most of them. Postpartum depression and anxiety are not "one-size-fits-all" illnesses.
2. Many new moms have a hard time, every now and then, for a day or two. We all have bad days. Postpartum depression and anxiety *are not* just bad days. Women with PPD or anxiety have symptoms like the ones listed below much of the time, for a period of at least 2 weeks or longer, and these symptoms make it feel very hard to live and enjoy your life each day.
3. Postpartum depression and anxiety are sometimes "comorbid." This means you can have a bit of both, or all of both. If you have symptoms on both lists, that's not unusual.

### *Postpartum Depression Symptoms*

You may have **postpartum depression** if you have had a baby within the last 12 months and are experiencing *some* of these symptoms:

- You feel overwhelmed. Not like "hey, this new mom thing is hard." More like "I can't do this and I'm never going to be able to do this." You feel like you just can't handle being a mother. In fact, you may be wondering whether you should have become a mother in the first place.
- You feel guilty because you believe you should be handling new motherhood better than this. You feel like your baby deserves better. You worry whether your baby can tell that you feel so bad, or that you are crying so much, or that you don't feel the happiness or connection that you thought you would. You may wonder whether your baby would be better off without you.
- You don't feel bonded to your baby. You're not having that mythical mommy bliss that you see on TV or read about in magazines. Not everyone with PPD feels this way, but many do.
- You can't understand what is happening to you or why. You are very confused and scared.
- You feel irritated or angry. You have no patience. Everything annoys you. You feel resentment toward your baby, or your partner, or others. You feel out-of-control rage.

- You feel nothing, just emptiness and numbness. You are just going through the motions.
- You feel sadness to the depths of your soul. You can't stop crying, even when there's no real reason to be crying.
- You feel hopeless, like your situation will never ever get better. You feel weak and defective, like a failure.
- You can't bring yourself to eat, or perhaps the only thing that makes you feel better is eating.
- You can't sleep when the baby sleeps, nor can you sleep at any other time. Or maybe you can fall asleep, but you wake up in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep no matter how tired you are. Or maybe all you can do is sleep and you can't seem to get out of bed to get the most basic things done. Whichever it is, your sleeping is completely screwed up and it's not just because you have a newborn.
- You can't concentrate. You can't focus. You can't think of the words you want to say. You can't remember what you were supposed to do. You can't make a decision. You feel like you're in a fog.
- You feel disconnected. You feel strangely apart from everyone for some reason, like there's an invisible wall between you and the rest of the world.
- Maybe you're doing everything right. You are exercising. You are taking your vitamins. You have a healthy spirituality. You do yoga. You're thinking "Why can't I just get over this?" You feel like you should be able to snap out of it, but you can't.
- You might be having thoughts of running away and leaving your family behind. Or you've thought of driving off the road, or taking too many pills, or finding some other way to end this misery.
- You know something is wrong. You may not know you have a perinatal mood or anxiety disorder, but you know the way you are feeling is NOT right. You think you've "gone crazy".
- You are afraid that this is your new reality and that you've lost the "old you" forever.
- You are afraid that if you reach out for help people will judge you. Or that your baby will be taken away.

## Postpartum Anxiety & OCD

You may have **postpartum anxiety** or **postpartum OCD** if you have had a baby within the last 12 months and are experiencing *some* of these symptoms:

- Your thoughts are racing. You can't quiet your mind. You can't settle down. You can't relax.
- You feel like you have to be doing something at all times. Cleaning bottles. Cleaning baby clothes. Cleaning the house. Doing work. Entertaining the baby. Checking on the baby. Organizing things.
- You are worried. Really worried. All. The. Time. Am I doing this right? Will my husband come home from his trip? Will the baby wake up? Is the baby eating enough? Is there something wrong with my baby that I'm missing? No matter what anyone says to reassure you it doesn't help.
- You may be having disturbing thoughts. Thoughts that you've never had before. Scary thoughts that make you wonder whether you aren't the person you thought you were. They fly into your head unwanted and you know they aren't right, that this isn't the real you, but they terrify you and they won't go away. These thoughts may start with the words "What if ..."
- You are afraid to be alone with your baby because of scary thoughts or worries. You are also afraid of things in your house that could potentially cause harm like knives or stairs, and you avoid them.
- You may feel the need to check things constantly. Did I lock the door? Did I lock the car? Did I turn off the oven? Is the baby breathing?
- You may be having physical symptoms like stomach cramps or headaches, shakiness or nausea. You might even have panic attacks.
- You feel like a captive animal, pacing back and forth in a cage. Restless. On edge.

- You can't eat. You have no appetite.
- You're having trouble sleeping. You are so, so tired, but you can't sleep.
- You feel a sense of dread, like something terrible is going to happen.
- You know something is wrong. You may not know you have a perinatal mood or anxiety disorder, but you know the way you are feeling is NOT right. You think you've "gone crazy".
- You are afraid that this is your new reality and that you've lost the "old you" forever.
- You are afraid that if you reach out for help people will judge you. Or that your baby will be taken away.

## Postpartum Depression Help

Now that you've gone through these symptoms are you thinking, "How the heck do these people know me? Is there a hidden camera in here?" Nope! What this should tell you is that you are not alone and you are not defective and you are not a lost cause. If you are having these feelings and symptoms then you may have a common illness that 15 to 20% of all new mothers have, and these illnesses are completely treatable. So call your doctor.

## THE LOWDOWN

- **1 in every 7 women** will get a perinatal mood or anxiety disorder like postpartum depression or anxiety. These illnesses are not normal, but they are **very common**.
- If you are having the symptoms listed in this handout, call your doctor. Don't try to wait this out. These illnesses require professional treatment, and there are different types of treatments that work. **You WILL get well with help.**
- If you are already past 12 months postpartum and still suffering, you could still have PPD or anxiety. Women who haven't received treatment or who were not effectively helped can have symptoms that continue past the first year. You can still get help.
- If you are pregnant and are having symptoms like those listed above, you may be struggling with depression or anxiety during pregnancy, which is just as common. Let your OB know about your symptoms so he or she can help.
- If you are having moments where it seems like you are seeing or hearing things no one else does, are feeling paranoid as if others are out to get you, have more energy than you've ever had and feeling like you don't need sleep, or are having thoughts of harming yourself or others, call for help immediately. These could be signs of postpartum psychosis, an illness that can lead you to act in ways you wouldn't normally. For more information on the signs of postpartum psychosis, visit <http://www.postpartumprogress.com/the-symptoms-of-postpartum-psychosis-in-plain-mama-english>

**Postpartum Progress® is a nonprofit organization created by moms for moms with maternal mental illness. We know what it's like and we know how hard it is. To learn more about all the *free* programs & support we provide to moms just like you, visit us at <http://www.postpartumprogress.org/community>.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mom's age: \_\_\_\_\_

**I'd like to talk to you about the stress I've been having since I had my baby. Because I'm exhausted, overwhelmed & struggling, this is the best way for me to make sure you know what is going on with me, and that I might need your help. I think I might have (Mom, check any that may apply):**

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Postpartum depression (PPD) | <input type="checkbox"/> Postpartum psychosis                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Bipolar disorder or mania                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Postpartum anxiety or OCD   | <input type="checkbox"/> Postpartum PTSD (post-traumatic stress) | <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure; I just know something isn't right |

**Here are some of the recognized symptoms of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders that I have been having (Mom, check any that apply to you):**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can't sleep, even when my baby is sleeping.   | <input type="checkbox"/> My thoughts are racing. I can't sit still.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have lost my appetite.  | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel like the only way to make myself feel better is by using alcohol, prescription drugs or other substances.                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel sad. I have been crying a lot for no reason.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes I wonder if my baby or my family would be better off without me.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am feeling worried or anxious most of the time.   | <input type="checkbox"/> I've been having physical symptoms that are not normal for me (for example: migraines, back aches, stomach aches, shortness of breath, panic attacks) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am having anger or rage that is not normal for me.  | <input type="checkbox"/> I have had serious thoughts of hurting myself.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel numb or disconnected from my life. I can't enjoy the things I used to.   | <input type="checkbox"/> I have had thoughts that I should (not that I might or what if, but that <i>I should or need to</i> ) hurt my baby or someone else.                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't feel like I'm bonding with my baby.   | <input type="checkbox"/> I am worried I'm seeing or hearing things that other people don't see or hear.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am having scary "what if" thoughts over & over about harm coming to me, my baby or others (also called intrusive thoughts, a sign of postpartum OCD). | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm afraid to be alone with my baby.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel a lot of guilt and shame.  | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel very concerned or paranoid that other people might hurt me.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm worried that I'm not a good mother.   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel overwhelmed with all of the things in my life.   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can't concentrate or stay focused on things.  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel like I'm losing it.  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I want to be alone all or most of the time.   |  |

**I have had these symptoms for more than \_\_\_\_\_ weeks. I am \_\_\_\_\_ weeks/months (circle one) postpartum.**

**Here are some recognized risk factors for maternal mental illness that may help you understand my situation (Mom, check any that apply to you):**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have had depression, anxiety/OCD or PPD before   | <input type="checkbox"/> I have a lot of financial stress  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have a history of bipolar disorder or psychosis  | <input type="checkbox"/> I have had infertility treatment  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My family has a history of mental illness  | <input type="checkbox"/> My baby has colic, reflux or other health problems  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have a history of or am now going through trauma (for example: domestic violence, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, poverty, loss of a parent)       | <input type="checkbox"/> I have had a previous miscarriage or stillbirth   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have had a stressful event in the last year (for example: house move, job loss, divorce or relationship problems, or the death of a loved one) | <input type="checkbox"/> I have a history of diabetes, thyroid problems, or pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm a single mom   | <input type="checkbox"/> I delivered multiples   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't have much help or support at home from my partner or family members  | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm away from my home country or culture  |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> I or my baby had problems in pregnancy or childbirth (for example: baby in NICU, unplanned C-section, bed rest) |

This checklist is not intended to diagnose any mental illness. It is a discussion tool for moms to use with healthcare providers. It was created by Postpartum Progress, a national nonprofit supporting moms with maternal mental illness. For more free tools and support for perinatal mood & anxiety disorders, visit [postpartumprogress.org](http://postpartumprogress.org).