

Common Intrusive Thoughts in the Postpartum Period



PMADs (Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders) are the **most common complication of childbirth, and this time period is your lifetime highest risk for developing depression or anxiety.**

Standardized maternal mental health screening tests do not always capture the range of complicated emotions moms can experience in real life. Below are compilations of thoughts I have heard frequently expressed over the years, and resources for getting help if you are suffering.

Everyone says they are so in love with their babies. What is wrong with me that I don't feel bonded to my baby at all?

I am exhausted and I have absolutely zero motivation to do anything. They have checked my thyroid, my blood counts – everything. They say this is just being a new mom. But it feels like more than that.

Breastfeeding is a miserable experience. My body is failing me. No one can seem to help. I'm in constant pain and my baby screams when I put her near my breast. I want to stop, but I feel so guilty and I'm sure all the other moms will judge me for using formula.

I have this repeated vision of me smothering the baby with the blanket. I am horrified by this and never would do it, but it's stuck in my head. I am afraid to tell anyone for fear that my baby would be taken away and I would be sent to jail.

I feel like a failure. I don't know why I had this baby. I'm so used to being good at everything, and I'm a total mess. Everyone else is going to playdates, and I'm walking around the house half naked still wearing postpartum underwear because every time I cry, I pee.

I feel awful about my postpartum body. I can't imagine what my partner thinks. The other moms look so good.

I started hemorrhaging after birth and they took my baby away to the NICU. I didn't get to see her for days. I can't even look at pictures of moms doing skin-to-skin – I was forever robbed of this experience.

I can't make any decisions to save my life. Even basic things like grocery shopping, I find my brain feeling totally foggy or spinning out.

I need a break, but I can't give up control of taking care of my baby.

"Self care"? That doesn't even begin to explain what I actually need.

Everyone says I should ask for help, but I feel like I can't ask. I wish people would offer, or do things without me asking (like my partner).

I've been through therapy and made peace with my childhood, but now these past traumas are creeping back and won't go away.

I get panic attacks about driving. I constantly double check the car seat or have images of us being hit by a truck.

I find myself cleaning all the time and am paralyzed with worry about my baby getting sick.

Insomnia. I haven't slept my entire pregnancy.

It's my second baby, and I feel the same breastfeeding problems setting in again. I feel sad and alone while other moms feed their babies without worry. How long will this go on? Months again?

I feel like I cry or am constantly about to cry all the time.

I feel resentful towards everyone – including my baby.

I have a history of infertility, but now that I had this "rainbow" baby, I didn't realize I would feel so conflicted about motherhood.

My birth experience was so traumatic. I literally feel like damaged goods. I don't think I will ever be myself again.

My baby is starting to sleep more at night, but I am wide awake. I find myself browsing social media at 3 am and feeling more and more bad.

I got so freaked out when someone suggested I could be starving my baby that I have a scale to check my baby's weight after every feed – even though his weight gain is great.

If one more person touches me, I may scream.

After multiple miscarriages, I now have a viable pregnancy. But I am paralyzed with fear that something will go wrong and I keep going to the doctor's to get checked. I'm sure they think I'm crazy.

Everything my partner does is aggravating or stupid. I fly into a rage multiple times a day. I'm not depressed -- I'm just mad. I feel scared that I am going to lose control one day with the baby.

I need to take a shower, clean, cook, and spend time with my spouse/other kids. But I feel guilty not spending it all with the baby.

I can't help myself from checking to make sure my baby is breathing, and I can't ever relax. I feel like I'm constantly on edge worrying.

I have really strange and often disturbing thoughts. It can be anything from standing at the top of the stairs with my stroller and imagining us falling down the stairs, or looking at my baby on the changing table and worrying I may molest him. There is no way I would ever do this, and I find the thought repulsive. But I can't get it out of my head. I've started to have my partner give the baby his bath because I'm so afraid I may drown or hurt him.

I have a "high needs" baby, one that cries the second I put her down. The nights are the worst. I am absolutely losing my mind with exhaustion. I'm so jealous of friends with "easy" babies.

How to Get Help

- 24/7 SAMHSA Hotline: 800-662-HELP (4357)
- Postpartum Support International (Postpartum.net)
- Postpartum Stress Center (postpartumstress.com)
- 2020 Mom (2020mom.org)
- *Good Moms Have Scary Thoughts* (Karen Kleiman)
- *What about Us?* (Karen Kleiman)
- *The Postpartum Depression Workbook* (Abigail Burd)
- *The Pregnancy and Postpartum Anxiety Workbook* (P. Wiegartz)