

Assessing Your Risk for Postpartum Mood & Anxiety Disorders

Having a new baby is a special and challenging time in life. The physical exhaustion of pregnancy, childbirth and caring for a baby are hard enough without dealing with depression or anxiety. New mothers make many plans during pregnancy. One of those plans should be on how to maintain good mental health. The type of plan that you'll need will vary, depending on your risk factors.

Risk Factors that Can be Identified During Pregnancy

- 1) **Family History of Mental Health Concerns:** Do you have any close family members (parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts/uncles) who suffer from mental health concerns? *A family history of anxiety, depression or bipolar illness can all increase your risk postpartum.*
- 2) **Mother's own Mental Health History:** Have you had periods of mental health problems in the past? Are you having trouble with your mental health during your pregnancy? *Treating your symptoms during pregnancy will help to reduce your risk of issues postpartum.*
- 3) **Mother's Sensitivity to Hormonal Fluctuations:** Do you suffer from emotional ups and downs (irritability, sadness, anxiety) as part of your monthly cycle? Have you been diagnosed with PMDD? *It's important to note that feeling great during pregnancy does not necessarily mean that you are low risk. Women who are sensitive to hormonal changes may feel very good during pregnancy but very anxious or sad when hormones shift just before birth.*
- 4) **Mother's Personality:** Has anyone ever told you that you're a perfectionist? Do you fear losing control? Are you self-critical? Do you lack self-confidence? *Mothers who hold themselves to very high standards are more likely to struggle postpartum.*
- 5) **Mother's Personal History:** Were you abused or neglected in childhood? Have you been in an abusive or coercive relationship? *New motherhood is a time when problems from your own upbringing can resurface. Finding ways to process those feelings, through writing, art or therapy can be useful in heading off postpartum problems.*
- 6) **Parents Relationship:** Do you have a partner? Do you and your partner have a strong relationship? Is there any verbal or physical abuse in your relationship? Were both you and your partner happy to learn you were pregnant? *Having a supportive relationship lowers your risk of postpartum issues.*
- 7) **Social Support:** Do you have friends that you can call if you need them? Do you have someone near by who can help you with the baby once he is born?
- 8) **Life Stressors:** Are you under financial stress right now? Are there major life transitions, outside of pregnancy, that you are facing?

Risk Factors After Pregnancy:

- 1) **Birth Trauma:** Did your birth go differently than you had planned? Did you ever feel afraid that you or your baby would die? Do you have upsetting memories of the birth?

- 2) **Baby Temperament:** Does it feel that your baby is sleeping worse than other babies? Does it seem like your baby is crying more than other babies? Do you feel unable to soothe your baby