



Pregnancy and your mental health

Definition: Perinatal Mental Health (PMH) refers to the emotional and psychological well-being of individuals during pregnancy and the first year after childbirth

Important facts

- Among those with a PMH condition, 20% will experience suicidal thoughts or engage in acts of self-harm¹
- The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 1 in 5 women will experience a mental health (MH) condition during the perinatal period

PMH covers a wide range of MH conditions. Examples include mild changes in mood to more severe MH symptoms. It can affect people who give birth as well as their partners.

Health providers are trained to ask about PMH symptoms. Providing resources is key to supporting these needs.

Common mental health conditions during the perinatal period

- **Prenatal Depression:** Depression during pregnancy, which may include feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyable.
- **Postpartum Depression (PPD):** Depression that occurs after childbirth, with symptoms similar to prenatal depression but happening after the baby is born. This may interfere with bonding with the baby and daily functioning.
- **Anxiety Disorders:** General anxiety, panic attacks, or specific anxiety related to pregnancy or childbirth (such as fear of labor, harm to the baby, or new parenting challenges).
- **Postpartum Anxiety:** Anxiety that occurs after childbirth often includes a worry about the baby's health or fear of being a bad parent.
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** This may result after a traumatic birth experience, such as an emergency C-section or any event that caused significant fear or distress.
- **Bipolar Disorder:** Can develop or worsen during the perinatal period.
- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD):** May involve intrusive thoughts about harm coming to the baby or obsessive concerns about cleanliness or safety.

1. <https://www.who.int/news/item/19-09-2022-launch-of-the-who-guide-for-integration-of-perinatal-mental-health>

Risk factors

- History of MH symptoms
- Traumatic birth experiences
- Lack of social support
- Financial stress or life stressors
- Hormonal changes

Symptoms of PMH issues

- Persistent sadness, hopelessness, or tearfulness
- Extreme fatigue, lack of energy, or trouble sleeping
- Difficulty bonding with the baby or a lack of interest in the baby
- Fear of being unable to care for the baby or being a bad parent
- Intense anxiety, panic attacks, or obsessive thoughts
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- In severe cases, thoughts of self-harm or harming the baby (which requires immediate attention)

Treatment and support

Early detection of MH symptoms is ideal. This allows for support to occur in a quick way to help.

- **Therapy and counseling:** Counseling is often effective in treating PMH issues.
- **Medications:** There are medications that can help your symptoms and are safe to use during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. Ask the doctor about the risks and benefits.
- **Support networks:** Having a strong support system, including partners, family, friends, or peer support groups, can reduce feelings of isolation and help with MH symptoms.
- **Self-care:** Regular exercise, proper nutrition, sleep, and relaxation techniques are important for MH during the perinatal period.

MH in partners

Much of the focus is naturally on the birthing parent. Co-parents can also experience MH issues during this period. Postpartum depression for the co-parent has become a rising issue.

Conclusion

Supporting PMH symptoms is important for the health of:

- The parents
- The baby
- And the family unit as a whole

Have open talks with your provider about how you are feeling. When you pay attention to symptoms early you can reduce long-term issues. This will help create a healthier family situation.

If you or someone you know is struggling with PMH reach out to a healthcare provider, counselor, or support group. This is an important first step.