



MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

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What is Maternal Mental Health?

“You cannot tell just by looking at her”

- ALL mothers experience stress from time to time – motherhood is a tough job!
- **Sound familiar?**
 - Anxiety and stress related to feeding and sleeping
 - Breastfeeding struggles
 - Poor sleep and eating patterns
 - Lack of routine
 - Forgetfulness
 - Tension with partner
 - Social isolation



When is it too much?

- Sometimes, this stress can become so strong that it gets in the way of a mother's relationships and daily functioning. This is what we mean by Maternal Mental Health (MMH) problems.

Symptoms (stress)



+

Impairment (getting in the way)



Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs) and Traumatic Stress

- Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) are the most widely recognized MMH problems.
- PMADs are *not* the “baby blues,” which impact up to 80% of women, and may include unexplained tearfulness resulting from sharp changes in hormones. The blues resolve naturally within two weeks.
- In addition to mood and anxiety, mothers who experienced traumatic events as children or adults, including traumatic births, are at risk of mental health problems.



How common are MMH problems?

- Depression and anxiety disorders are one of the most common, yet most under-diagnosed complications of pregnancy, affecting 1 in 7 women.
- 15-20% of U.S. women who give birth each year will be affected by a maternal mental health disorder, which can occur during pregnancy and up to one-year postpartum.
- In extreme cases, a woman may develop postpartum psychosis (affects .1 to .2% of all new mothers), in which she may become delusional or paranoid, heightening the risk of safety concerns for herself or her child.

1 in 7



What causes MMH problems?

- No single cause, but likely result from a combination of physical, psychiatric, and environmental risk factors.
- **Maternal mental health concerns do not occur because of something a mother does or does not do!**
- Hormone changes play a big role (estrogen and progesterone), particularly after childbirth.
 - Leads to chemical changes in her brain that may trigger mood swings.
- Many mothers are unable to get the rest they need to fully recover from giving birth. Constant sleep deprivation leads to physical discomfort and exhaustion, which can contribute to the symptoms of mental health concerns.

What are the signs?

- Symptoms of a maternal mental health disorder may include:
 - Feeling sad, moody, irritable, hopeless, or overwhelmed, or crying more often or for no apparent reason, or losing interest in enjoyable activities and people.
 - Excessive worry, anxiety or fear.
 - Oversleeping or being unable to sleep, even when her baby is asleep.
 - Having trouble concentrating, remembering details and making decisions.
 - Physical aches and pains (frequent headaches, stomach problems and muscle pain), or eating too little or too much.
 - Having trouble bonding or forming an emotional attachment with her baby, or persistently doubting her ability to care for her baby.
 - Experiencing intrusive thoughts about harming herself or her baby, rage and anger
 - Upsetting memories from the past, nightmares, or avoiding reminders of upsetting experiences.

What if I am concerned?

- Women should talk to their doctor about adjusting to pregnancy and life after childbirth, both physically and emotionally.
- If a mother or a family member is concerned about her mental health, a healthcare professional can discuss these concerns and options for treatment.
- In addition to asking about her mental health, a professional might ask her questions about sleep, eating habits, and may order tests to rule out other medical concerns, such as thyroid conditions.
- There are many effective treatments for maternal mental health disorders, such as social support groups, counseling, medication, or alternative therapies. A woman's health-care provider can help her choose the best treatment for her.

Family members and friends may be the first to recognize symptoms of a maternal mental health disorder in a pregnant woman or new mother. Encourage her to speak with a health-care provider, offer emotional support and assist with daily tasks such as caring for the baby or home.

What about dads?

- Though fathers don't experience the same physical changes as women do through pregnancy and childbirth, they are exposed to some of the same stressors, such as significant sleep changes, which can trigger depression or anxiety.

Roughly 10% of fathers suffer from depression in the first year after having a new baby, with young fathers being at the highest risk.



Resources

- Postpartum Support International (PSI) warmline: 800-944-4PPD (4773) or Family Tree Parenting HelpLine: 800-243-8337
- Baltimore City Residents: Healthcare Access Maryland, 410-649-0526
- Psychiatry and therapy services: UMMC Adult Outpatient Clinic: 410-328-6018, Early Childhood Clinic for young children and their families: 410-328-5881
- **If you or someone you know is in crisis or thinking of suicide, get help quickly** by calling your doctor, or calling 911 for emergency services or go to the nearest emergency room or calling 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at: 800-273-TALK (8255)
- **Maternal Depression Toolkit:** <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4878/SMA14-4878.pdf>
- **2020 Mom:** <http://www.2020mom.org/>
- **National Maternal Mental Health Coalition:** mmhcoalition.com