

Postpartum Psychosis and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



What is Postpartum Psychosis (PPP)?

- Active Postpartum Psychosis is a psychiatric emergency and if someone is currently experiencing symptoms support them in accessing emergency services.
- Postpartum Psychosis is very rare and occurs in approximately 1 or 2 births out of 1,000 births.
- Symptoms can include delusions, paranoia, auditory and visual hallucinations, rapid mood swings, trouble with communication, irritability, hyperactivity or feeling awake even if they have had very little sleep. The person may seem cognitively impaired (they may seem different than their usual self) and might not be aware of present time and place.
- Symptoms also include thoughts of self-harm, harm to others or harm to baby.
- When someone feels that their thoughts of harm to others or self-harm or paranoias and delusions make sense, that is an indication of psychosis.

What is Perinatal Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

- PTSD is an anxiety disorder that develops as a result of experiencing trauma.
- You can experience any event in the Perinatal period as traumatic; i.e. a pregnancy loss or release, fertility treatments, bleeding during pregnancy, labour and delivery, obstetric violence, a NICU stay, experiencing a PMAD, nursing challenges, among others. Everyone interprets and experiences potentially traumatic situations differently thus someone might have an unplanned c-section and not experience it as traumatic, where others might.
- Previous trauma, feeling powerless, poor communication or lack of support during delivery, and experiencing an injury or near death experience during labour and delivery can all contribute to developing PTSD. If you felt your life or baby's life was in danger that can contribute to trauma. If you felt in control, supported and that your life was not in danger then you are less likely to experience the event as traumatic.
- Isolation can add to the experience of trauma, so dealing with the above situations during COVID, with restrictions on visitors and not as much access to community can contribute to developing post-trauma symptoms.

Symptoms of PPTSD can and do look very similar to anxiety. Symptoms of PTSD in the Perinatal period can include:

- Flashbacks to the traumatic events, nightmares, panic attacks, intrusive thoughts, dissociation (numbing/detachment) and/or a sense of unreality.
- Physical reactions include feeling amped up or on edge, irritability, trouble sleeping, exaggerated startle response (you scare easily), and anxiety.
- Avoidance of reminders of the trauma (ie. not driving near the hospital) and dissociation (numbing).

WHERE TO FIND US



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