

POSTPARTUM PSYCHOSIS

Information for Family and Friends



WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Trust your gut: you know your loved one better than anyone and if you think something is wrong, bring the mother to a local emergency room or crisis center. Postpartum psychosis is a medical emergency and should be treated immediately.

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN?

Many names may be used to clinically describe an episode of psychosis or mania following childbirth, a fact that can be confusing for patients and families. Most doctors will use the term postpartum psychosis, but you may also hear "postpartum mania", "puerperal psychosis", "postnatal/perinatal psychosis", "postpartum depression with psychotic features", "bipolar disorder with postpartum onset", or "postpartum bipolar disorder with psychotic features", among others. Use of these other terms does not necessarily mean that the mom will have further episodes of mania or psychosis, but we encourage you to speak with the doctor about long-term treatment plans if you have any concerns. While PP can be an alarming experience for women and families, it is a treatable illness from which most women fully recover.

HOW CAN I HELP?

Support: Emphasize the importance of sleep, support, and medication adherence. These will help the mother recover as soon as possible.

Communicate with providers: Doctors, social workers, and therapists are all here to help you, and can help you figure out when it is time to engage in more treatment or go to the hospital.

Advocate: There are effective medications to treat postpartum psychosis—if the first medications don't work, speak up.

WHAT WILL RECOVERY LOOK LIKE? WHEN WILL SHE BE BACK TO NORMAL?

Each woman's recovery follows a unique timeline. Recovery can be a long and difficult journey, but most women do return to their normal selves. Treatment for PP almost always includes hospitalization, medication, and therapy. There are many medication options, so it may be a while before the mother and her doctor find the regimen that works best. After manic and psychotic symptoms resolve, many women will continue to experience depression and anxiety symptoms before becoming well. The most severe symptoms of PP typically last between 2 and 12 weeks, although full recovery can take up to a year.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR THE FIRST EPISODE AND RECURRENT EPISODES?

A history of postpartum psychosis and personal or family history of bipolar disorder may put the mother at risk for PP. Risk factors (for initial episode and relapse) include history of bipolar disorder in family, history of anxiety or depression prior to or during pregnancy, lack of sleep, lack of support with childcare, stressful/traumatic birth or postnatal experience.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE THERE?

There are a number of online support groups for survivors and family members, as well as guides for loved ones, books, and videos. Please visit MGHP3.org/Resources for more information.

**The Postpartum
Psychosis Project**
at Massachusetts General Hospital

Find resources, research,
and more at MGHP3.org or
call (617)-643-7205

in partnership with Postpartum
Support International

If this is a psychiatric emergency,
please call your doctor or 911
and go to your
nearest emergency room.

