

Puerperal Psychosis

Aims of the factsheet

- To help you know more about puerperal psychosis (also known as postpartum psychosis)
- To share tips and insights from mothers who have recovered from puerperal psychosis
- To find out what support there is available to you

What is puerperal psychosis?

Puerperal psychosis (PP) is a severe, but fairly rare mental illness, which is most likely to occur in the first two weeks after birth. It can develop very quickly (often within a few hours). Symptoms can change very quickly from hour to hour and from one day to the next.

Feeling high or euphoric is normal after birth, but early warning signs of puerperal psychosis include:

- Feeling very low or very elated
- Not being able to sleep or switch off
- Behaving in ways which are out of character

If you have symptoms of postpartum psychosis you should see your GP right away or go to your local A&E department.

Will I recover?

Almost all women who have PP make a full recovery. There are no known negative links between having an episode of PP and the development of your baby.

It is important that you get the appropriate support and seek help as soon as you experience any symptoms of PP.

Having gone through PP can knock your confidence as a mother. Remember that you already have a special bond from before birth and your baby knows you are Mum.

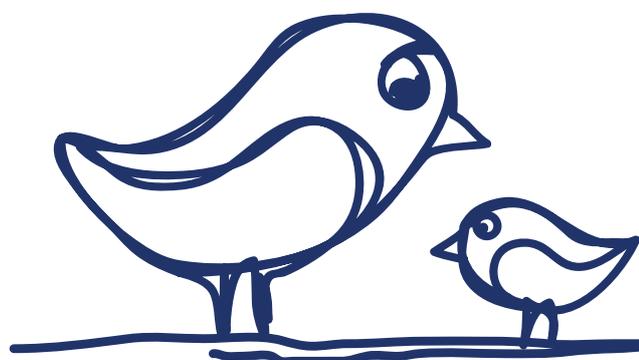
Experiences and tips from mothers who have recovered from puerperal psychosis

Going through a whole range of difficult emotions when you begin to recover from PP is normal. Asking 'why me?' is also very common.

Mothers who have successfully recovered say they experienced feelings of shock, embarrassment, anger, exhaustion, guilt and worry about bonding with your baby, your relationship and your future health.

Symptoms

- Delusions or strange beliefs
- Hallucinations - seeing or hearing things that aren't there
- Feeling very irritated
- Hyperactivity
- Decreased need for, or inability, to sleep
- Paranoia and suspiciousness
- Rapid mood swings or feeling very elated (mania)
- Difficulty communicating at times



How can I take care of myself?

As you get better and the treatments begin to work you can feel quite physically and emotionally drained.

All new mothers feel exhausted. But as well as having a new baby you are also recovering from a serious illness so it's very important to sleep, rest and take it easy.

Gather practical help around the house from friends and family.

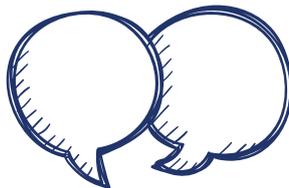
Leave the housework and rest when your baby is sleeping.

Put a time limit on household tasks such as laundry and reward yourself with a break on a regular basis.

Go for short walks during the day, when your baby is restless.

If possible, share responsibility for night feeds with your partner.

Talk to your mental health team about your treatments. Taking medication at bedtime can help you feel less tired during the day.



What support is available to me after PP?

It's important to remember that there is support available for you and your baby. You could:

- Speak to your GP, health visitor or community mental health team
- Complete a free 'Enjoy your Baby' cognitive behavioural therapy online course at www.twoinmind.org
- Join the Action on Postpartum Psychosis peer support network
- Join an internet forum such as Mumsnet or the Postpartum Mood Disorder Forum

Tips to aid your recovery

- Ask your mental health team for a summary of events and your treatment.
- Talk to your partner or family about what happened or create a photo time line.
- Watch stories about other women's experiences on the Two in Mind Website.
- Get practical help. Try to be as clear as possible about the help you would like.
- Ask health visitors or family members for practical tips on looking after or playing with your baby. Feeling anxious and unsure about looking after your baby is normal for all new mothers.

Baby's top 5 games to play with mum

- Peek-a-boo
- Singing nursery rhymes
- Banging things to make noise
- Copy-cat – watching mum pull silly faces as she copies my expressions
- Splashing water in the bath



Useful contacts:

Action for Postpartum Psychosis:
www.app-network.org

Mumsnet:
mumsnet.com

NHS Choices:
<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/postpartum-psychosis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Postpartum Mood Disorder Forum:
postpartumdepression.yuku.com/

Royal College of Psychiatrist:
rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/postpartumpsychosis.aspx

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