

Post Partum Mood Disorder-One Mother's Experience

Although I was elated to be pregnant for the second time, I experienced anxiety prenatally. Prior to becoming pregnant, I underwent several life changes; we bought a new house, we got married, my husband and I both started new jobs, and I completed my practicum for a Social Work Degree. These were positive changes; however, they were still stressful. The stressors I was dealing with coupled with my generalized anxiety disorder (an individual who worries continually about a lot of things) made me a high risk for developing post partum mood disorder (PPMD). PPMD is more commonly referred to as post partum depression.

My daughter was born and my anxiety became unrelenting. I developed post partum anxiety which falls under the umbrella of a post partum mood disorder. My husband works in the oilfield industry which has him on 15 days on/6 days off rotation. This led to feelings of loneliness and isolation. My post partum therapist at the time noted that many of her clients' husbands worked in the oilfield and were away for extended periods of time. My sleep was interrupted, I was parenting an older child, and my negative reactions to my stressors were increasing daily. I began to worry excessively about possible harm happening to my children. These worrying thoughts are classified as "**intrusive thoughts**" and can be indicators an individual may have PPMD. If someone you know shares these types of thoughts with you, remain calm and suggest they make an appointment with their doctor.

I became afraid of being alone with my children. I became obsessed with the possibility of someone breaking into our home. I felt vulnerable and subsequently exhausted dealing with these issues. I stayed with my parents while my husband was away, and shared my intrusive thoughts with close family and friends. Sharing these thoughts with supportive people can be positive and may indicate that an individual is less likely to carry out the intrusive thoughts. It is important to note that only 1 in 1000 of PPMD patients move into post partum psychosis; however, it is critical that their first line treatment be brief hospitalization with a chemical intervention with successful treatment outcome. My anxiety became unbearable so I went to see my doctor, a post partum specialist, and began taking an anti-depressant. My husband was flown home from work and was integral in helping me to regain my well-being. I had good days and bad days and it is not unusual to have these feelings come and go, "good" days alternating with "bad" days.

Sharing my experience with Post Partum Mood Disorder is important to me because I want to reduce the stigma attached to post partum depression. My PPMD therapist mentioned support groups, but, regrettably, I declined. It is only now that I have helped to co-facilitate **Mindful Connections** –a post partum mood disorder group offered at Family Services of Central Alberta, with the support of Alberta Health Services, that I have realized how beneficial sharing my story has been. The women describe the weekly group as an invaluable source of support and information.

Recognize, identify, and refer any individual who may be exhibiting the symptoms listed below to their doctor, public health nurse or Alberta mental health so they can get help sooner rather than later.

Four common symptoms of postpartum depression:

- Anxiety
- Forgetting to eat/overeating
- Irritability
- Overwhelmed or withdrawing

Oftentimes moms do not identify that they may be suffering from Post Partum Mood Disorder, until their baby is older. Many moms (1 out of 10 develops PPMD) suffer in silence because of the idealistic view that having a baby is always “magical”. Remember that your hormones do not regulate for up to one year after childbirth. Be gentle with yourself. Rest and eat well. Do not stress about not actually sleeping, but incorporate rest periods into your day. Your job is taking care of the baby and yourself.

By Cheri Morrison –Judson. Cheri is a facilitator of a support group for new moms at Family Services of Central Alberta.

To access a post partum mood disorder group in Red Deer, call 403-343-6400 or go to www.fsca.ca.