

Plain Mama English

from *Postpartum Progress*®



The Symptoms of Postpartum Psychosis

In Plain Mama English

What does it feel like to have postpartum psychosis? What are the symptoms? How do you know when you have it? If you are concerned about whether you or a loved one may be struggling with postpartum psychosis or postpartum depression with psychotic features, following is a list of symptoms to help you identify if you have this serious maternal mental illness.

When you read the list of symptoms below, keep in mind you may not be experiencing all of them. Postpartum psychosis is not a “one-size-fits-all” illness. Your experience may be focused on just a few of the following symptoms and you may not have others at all.

You may have **postpartum psychosis** or **postpartum depression with psychotic features** if you have had a baby within the last 12 months and are experiencing some of these symptoms:

- You feel like you have more energy than you’ve ever had in your life. This is like nothing you’ve ever experienced, and you just had a baby! You feel great. You may even feel like you don’t need sleep because there are things that must get done. On the other hand, you might feel very tired and wish you could sleep but your mind simply refuses to shut down.
- You feel like suddenly you understand EVERYTHING, like your brain is functioning on a new and different level. You are able to make connections you’ve never noticed before between people, places and things. Everything in life makes more sense to you now.
- You are hearing and/or seeing things that no one else does or that you know are not there. You may have what seem like voices in your head that won’t stop no matter what you do. The voices comment about your actions or tell you things, sometimes terrible things like you the idea that you may need to hurt someone or do something you would never do otherwise. Perhaps you feel the radio, television, nature or God is speaking directly to you and you alone or giving you secret messages.
- You feel fearful or paranoid. You may believe that you can’t trust people or have become suspicious of your family and friends — people you always trusted prior to this. You may feel they are trying to get rid of you or stop you from doing what needs to be done. You also may feel that people (family, friends, strangers or outside forces) are going to purposely or accidentally harm you or your child.
- You feel like you need to talk a lot or that you can’t stop talking.
- You believe you are suddenly unique and special in some way, have some greater purpose, mission, powers or have been possessed (however, you don’t want to talk about it to anyone because you know, for whatever reason, they won’t understand). Or you feel these same things are true of your baby.

- You feel confused. You cannot remember how to do things you knew how to do previously — for example, like how to make a batch of cookies, read a map, program your phone or find the doctor’s office. You may also have trouble focusing, like reading or doing math or following a plot on TV.
- You feel like you are losing track of time. Or time seems very sped up or extremely slowed down.
- You feel like you are living in a dream world.
- You are getting into conflict with those around you or are feeling very irritable. Although there may be real issues between you and others, you are getting into more conflicts with others than you ever used to.
- You don’t feel the same inhibitions as usual and are behaving in ways you never have before or doing things you never have before.
- People who care about you think there is something wrong with you, are worried about you, or say that you are acting strange or weird and are different from how you used to be.
- You may feel as if you are being controlled by some outside force. This force may be telling you to harm someone. Or you may have strange violent urges. These strange violent thoughts may present themselves as possible solutions to problems.
- You don’t like what is happening to you and are scared. You know that something is terribly wrong and you don’t understand it. You think you’ve gone “crazy”.
- You are afraid you will never get better. You may even believe that the only way to get out of this or to protect the ones you love is to hurt yourself or someone else.

If you have postpartum psychosis, you can get better with professional help. The key **is to seek help immediately**. **Do not delay in calling your doctor, calling 911, or getting yourself (or anyone you suspect of suffering from this) to an emergency room immediately.** Be open about describing your symptoms. You can even print out this symptom list and bring it with you to share to help the doctors understand what you are experiencing.

THE LOWDOWN

- **1 to 2 in every 1,000 women** will get postpartum psychosis.
- Symptoms of postpartum psychosis often appear in the first few days and weeks after the baby is born.
- Postpartum psychosis is **an emergency**. If you suspect you or someone you love has postpartum psychosis, you/she should be with someone at all times until a trained healthcare provider says otherwise. This is simply to protect you from the illness, which can lead you to act in ways that are harmful to you or others.
- It can be hard to recognize when you have postpartum psychosis, so it is often your loved ones who will recognize that you may need help.

Postpartum Progress® is a nonprofit organization created by moms for moms with maternal mental illness. We know what it’s like and we know how hard it is. To learn more about all the *free* programs & support we provide to moms just like you, visit us at <http://www.postpartumprogress.org/community>.