

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorder

Perinatal mood and anxiety disorder (PMAD) is a mental health condition that happens when a person feels excessive sadness, anger, or worry and tension (anxiety) during pregnancy or during the first few months after the birth. This condition can last a few months or may continue for years if left untreated. PMAD may cause serious problems for the mother, her baby, or the father if not properly managed. Depression and anxiety can interfere with the ability to take care of the baby. It also may affect work, school, relationships, and other everyday activities. Having the baby blues is considered normal. Mild to moderate levels of sadness, exhaustion, and generally struggling with being a parent are considered the blues. Many parents experience these during the first 1–2 weeks after giving birth. If these symptoms become worse or last too long, it may be PMAD.

What are the causes?

The exact cause of this condition is not known. It may result from a combination of hormone changes and biological, social, and psychological factors.

What increases the risk?

The following factors may make you more likely to develop this condition:

- Having a personal or family history of depression, anxiety, or mood disorders.
- Experiencing a stressful life event during pregnancy, such as the death of a loved one.
- Having additional life stress, such as being a single parent.
- Having thyroid problems.

What are the signs or symptoms?

Symptoms of this condition include:

Physical symptoms, such as:

- Panic attacks. These are intense episodes of fear or discomfort that may also cause sweating, nausea, shortness of breath, or fear of dying. They usually last 5–15 minutes but can last longer.
- Performing repetitive tasks to relieve stress or worry (obsessive compulsive disorder, or OCD).
- Problems with appetite or sleep.

Emotional symptoms, such as:

- Excessive worry about problems or feeling like something bad will happen (generalized anxiety disorder).
- Phobias, which are fears of certain objects or situations.
- Separation anxiety, or fear and stress about leaving certain people or loved ones.
- Behavioral symptoms, such as:
- Depression, or lack of motivation and energy.
- Intense mood swings involving emotional highs and lows.
- Feeling out of control or like you are going crazy.
- Having difficulty bonding with your baby.

Some people also have trouble relaxing, problems concentrating, problems sleeping, frequent nightmares, and disturbing thoughts. PMAD can be different for everyone and can affect men as well as women.

How is this diagnosed?

This condition is diagnosed based on a physical exam and mental evaluation. In some cases, your health care provider may use an anxiety or depression screening tool. This includes a list of questions that can help a health care provider diagnose PMAD. You may be referred to a mental health expert who specializes in treating PMAD.

How is this treated?

This condition may be treated with:

- Talk therapy with a mental health professional. This may be family therapy, marriage therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, or interpersonal therapy.
- Medicines. Your health care provider will discuss medicines that are safe to use during pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- Stress reduction therapies, such as mindfulness, deep breathing, or guided muscle relaxation.
- Support groups, early childhood education, or other groups to help with being a parent.
- Follow these instructions at home:
- Lifestyle
- Do not use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco. These products include cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and vaping devices, such as e-cigarettes. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.
- Do not drink alcohol when you are pregnant. It is also safest not to drink alcohol if you are breastfeeding.
 - After your baby is born, if you drink alcohol:
Limit how much you have to 0–1 drink a day.
Be aware of how much alcohol is in your drink. In the U.S., one drink equals one 12 oz bottle of beer (355 mL), one 5 oz glass of wine (148 mL), or one 1½ oz glass of hard liquor (44 mL).

Consider joining a support group for new mothers. Ask your health care provider for recommendations.

Take good care of yourself. Make sure you:

- Get as much rest as possible. Talk with your partner about sharing the responsibility of getting up with your baby if possible. Make sleep a priority.
- Eat a healthy diet. This includes plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.
- Exercise regularly, as told by your health care provider. Ask your health care provider what exercises are safe for you. Talk with your partner about making sure you both have opportunities to exercise.

General instructions

Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.

Talk with your partner or family members about your feelings during pregnancy. Share your concerns, needs, or anxieties with each other. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Find a mental health professional, if needed.

Ask for help with tasks or chores when you need it. Ask friends and family members to provide meals, watch your children, or help with cleaning. If friends or family are not able to help, consider finding a licensed child care provider or professional house cleaner if needed. Let your partner know what you need. He or she may be struggling too.

Keep all follow-up visits. This is important.

Contact a health care provider if:

- You or people close to you notice that you have symptoms of anxiety or depression.
- Your symptoms of anxiety or depression get worse.
- You take medicines and have side effects that are uncomfortable or difficult to tolerate.
- Get help right away if:
- You feel like hurting yourself, your baby, or someone else.

If you feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. Go to your nearest emergency department or:

- Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).
- Call a suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or 988 in the U.S. This is open 24 hours a day in the U.S.
- Text the Crisis Text Line at 741741 (in the U.S.).

Summary

Perinatal mood and anxiety disorder (PMAD) is when a woman or her partner feels excessive sadness, anger, or worry and tension (anxiety) during pregnancy or during the first few months after the birth. PMAD may include depression, intense mood swings, panic attacks, separation anxiety, phobias, or generalized anxiety. PMAD can cause problems for the mother, the baby, or the father if not properly managed. This condition is treated with medicines, talk therapy, stress reduction therapies, or a combination of treatments. Talk with your partner or family members about your concerns or fears. Ask for help when you need it.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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