

Postpartum OCD is more than just the baby blues

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Being pregnant with my first baby, I read up on everything. There wasn't a single aspect of postpartum life that I wasn't prepared for. I read articles about diapering, birthing methods, recovering from a C-section and getting back into exercise after giving birth. I read about how to get my baby to sleep, what her different cries might mean and how and when to feed her. I also read about postpartum depression.

Most women feel a little blue, my sources said, but if I found my sadness persisting, if I cried a lot or felt hopeless, I should contact my doctor. I stored this information away, prepared to bravely call for help if I found myself crying over television commercials or having feelings of sadness that just wouldn't go away. I wouldn't be one of those women who needed help but didn't get it.

Postpartum OCD: Feels like I am losing my mind

After my daughter was born, I didn't feel sad, I didn't have crying spells and I didn't feel hopeless. Based on everything I'd read and heard from my doctor, **I ruled out postpartum depression.** Instead, my symptoms made me feel like I was losing my mind.

On our way home from the hospital, with my tiny new bundle settled into the middle of her impossibly huge car seat, my husband told me about a story he heard on the news about a mother who was arrested for child neglect. She wasn't changing her baby's diapers, and her baby got sick and died. I watched the sunlit landscape passing by outside my window; farmland and rolling hills, and **I felt an overwhelming sense that the world was full of danger.**

Later that evening, I was struggling to get my baby to nurse. There was a crime show on television about child abusers. I was exhausted and collapsing under the pressure of being a new parent, recovering from a C-section and my milk hadn't come in. **The room started to feel small and I couldn't breathe.**

Postpartum OCD



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I looked around and saw dirt and contamination everywhere. I longed for the antiseptic clean of the hospital. Staring down at my baby, an image of her being kidnapped and abused by the men on TV flashed through my mind. I calmly asked my sister to hold the baby and walked into the bedroom and closed the door. **My heart was racing and I felt like I wasn't in control of my thoughts.** I was afraid I might pass out or have a seizure and not be able to care for my baby.

Over the next few months, **I was hounded by terrifying thoughts of harm coming to my daughter.** Every time I walked down the stairs, I pictured dropping her. Every time I started the car, I was afraid I might pass out while driving. At bath time, I pictured her slipping out of my grasp and drowning. I couldn't lay my baby down to sleep without checking on her every few minutes to make sure she wasn't succumbing to SIDS.

I wasn't aware that postpartum depression could manifest in other ways besides feelings of sadness and crying. I had no information about postpartum OCD or anxiety, so I didn't talk to my doctor about how I was feeling.

Postpartum OCD



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Not aware of what postpartum OCD was, I was afraid that talking about my intrusive thoughts would make my doctor feel like I was incapable of caring for my child. If I had been prepared with better information, I could have gotten help and saved myself from a year of panic attacks and scary, intrusive thoughts.

Here are some symptoms of postpartum OCD, according to the OCD Center of LA:

- Horrifying, intrusive thoughts of harming a baby
- Fear of accidentally harming a child through carelessness or dropping him
- Disturbing thoughts of sexually abusing a child
- Intrusive thoughts of harming the baby by exposure to medications, environmental toxins, germs, chemicals, or certain foods
- Changing routine compulsively out of fear of harming a baby
- Checking in on a baby repeatedly in fear something might have happened or might happen
- Fear of making a wrong decision (i.e., getting inoculations, feeding certain foods, taking antidepressants) leading to a serious or fatal outcome

If you're feeling this way, you're not crazy you are probably dealing with postpartum OCD symptoms. Nobody is going to accuse you of being crazy or being incapable of caring for your child. You don't have to suffer through your terror. Medication and therapy are very effective in treating postpartum OCD. Call your doctor for help.

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