

Scary Feelings

Delusions, Hallucinations, Intrusive Thoughts

What it feels like

All new parents will experience **some scary thoughts and feelings**. For some, those thoughts and feelings do not let up, even with support. **Delusions** are false beliefs that are not based in reality. **Hallucinations** are sensory experiences that seem real, but are not. **Intrusive thoughts** are unwanted and disturbing thoughts or images that pop into someone's head.

Why you might be feeling it

There are big **emotional, physical, and hormonal** changes that happen during the pregnancy and postpartum periods. These changes to our minds and bodies can result in **unfamiliar thoughts and feelings**. For some people, these symptoms become overwhelming and feel **uncontrollable, weird, or scary**. If we develop delusions - or strange and different ways of perceiving, understanding, or interpreting things - we may be developing **perinatal psychosis**. Which can create **safety** concerns and means we need help.



When we are
struggling,
we need support.



Not judgment.



What it looks like

Perinatal and **postpartum psychosis** can look very different for each person. For some, the symptoms may be very obvious; for others, they may be very subtle. **It is important to consider how symptoms have changed or increased over time.** Symptoms might include:

- having strange beliefs or delusions that can't be true
- hearing, seeing, feeling, or smelling things that aren't there
- confusion, agitation, racing thoughts, mania, not sleeping

How common are these conditions?

Many of us will have scary feelings, thoughts, or impulses during the pregnancy and postpartum periods. **Less than 1% of us will develop postpartum psychosis.** Despite the low prevalence, **we should all be aware** of this serious mental health complication. It's also important to understand that intrusive thoughts about injuring your baby are common. Having these thoughts does not mean you will hurt them. Even **when parents experience psychosis - it is very rare for them to do anything that will hurt their baby.** It's more likely that we might do something to hurt ourselves. So it's important to tell people what is happening and get help.

What you should know

Having scary thoughts and feelings about ourselves and our babies can **make us feel isolated, alone, and afraid.** But **you should never feel ashamed.** Sometimes things happen to us - and **it's not our fault.** When someone develops a serious perinatal mental health condition they deserve love, care, empathy, and understanding.

Telling a trusted friend or family member what's happening can help you feel less alone. Then you can work together to **find the help and support you need.**

It can be difficult to recognize symptoms of postpartum psychosis early on. Because postpartum psychosis disrupts the ability to tell what is real and what is not real, **it is not something you can manage on your own. Ask for help** as soon as you can.

What you can do

- **Ask for help.** Talking to others can help you feel less alone.
- **Seek treatment.** Effective treatments exist in a variety of settings.
- **Consider medication.** Talk to your doctor about the variety of medication options that exist to treat postpartum psychosis.
- **Go to the hospital or call 911.** If you are experiencing thoughts of harming yourself or others, seek emergency help immediately.

Medications and therapies that can help

- **Specialized care** and hospitalization may be necessary in an emergency
- Medications like **antipsychotics & mood stabilizers**
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**

Talking about SCARY FEELINGS

While it's normal to have some scary feelings during the postpartum period, postpartum **psychosis is an emergency that requires intervention.** If you experience big changes in your mood, feel disconnected from reality, or are having scary thoughts that feel outside of your control, **ASK FOR HELP.** You are not alone. There are people who can help. You can feel better.