Postpartum Anxiety

Understanding what you may be experiencing

A Gentle Reminder

Postpartum anxiety is a treatable health condition. It can affect thoughts, body sensations, sleep, decision-making, confidence, and your sense of safety. Anxiety does not mean you are failing, and your fears are not predictions.

What PPA Can Feel Like

- Worry that is difficult to turn off, even when things are going well.
- Feeling constantly on alert, tense, restless, or unable to relax.
- Replaying "what if" scenarios about the baby, your health, safety, feeding, sleep, illness, or something going wrong.
- Repeated checking, reassurance-seeking, researching, or avoiding situations because they feel unsafe or uncertain.
- Physical symptoms such as a racing heart, shakiness, nausea, tightness, dizziness, or shortness of breath.
- Irritability, difficulty concentrating, or feeling overwhelmed by decisions and everyday responsibilities.
- Difficulty sleeping or resting because your mind stays active—even when you have a chance to sleep.

Anxiety Can Feel Protective

Worrying, checking, researching, or staying on alert may feel like what keeps your baby safe. These behaviors can bring short-term relief while teaching anxiety that the threat must have been real.

You Do Not Need Zero Anxiety

Recovery is not about never worrying again. It is about noticing worry, deciding what truly needs attention, and continuing to live even when some uncertainty remains.

PPA does not look the same for everyone

You can be anxious and still appear organized, capable, productive, or calm. Anxiety may show up as over-preparing, constant monitoring, difficulty trusting others with the baby, or feeling responsible for preventing every possible problem. Distress and interference matter more than how "functional" you look from the outside.

When Worry Becomes More Than "Normal"

New parenthood naturally brings concern. Anxiety deserves clinical attention when worry is excessive or difficult to control, causes significant distress, disrupts sleep or functioning, or leads to repeated checking, reassurance-seeking, or avoidance.

What Recovery Can Look Like

- Continuing therapy and naming the worries, images, body sensations, or situations that keep anxiety going.
- Discussing medication or other medical treatment options with an OB-GYN, primary care provider, or psychiatric prescriber when symptoms are significant.
- Protecting sleep and reducing unnecessary demands when possible, because exhaustion can intensify anxiety.
- Learning to respond differently to anxious thoughts instead of trying to achieve complete certainty or eliminate every possible risk.
- Practicing small steps toward situations anxiety has made difficult while tracking distress and confidence over time.

A Useful Reframe

Instead of "If I stop worrying, something bad could happen," try: "My brain is asking for certainty. I can take reasonable care of my baby without responding to every anxious alarm."

Anxiety Often Wants Certainty

Postpartum anxiety can make uncertainty feel dangerous. Recovery is not about proving that nothing bad will happen. It is about noticing an anxious thought, tolerating some uncertainty, and choosing what matters without letting fear make every decision.

- Pause before checking, researching, asking for reassurance, or avoiding.
- Ask: "Is this a reasonable safety step, or is anxiety asking me for certainty?"
- Practice allowing some uncertainty when the situation is objectively safe.
- Notice what happens when anxiety rises and falls without immediately responding to it.

When Your Brain Says "What If?"

You do not have to answer every "what if" question. Sometimes the most helpful response is: "Maybe, maybe not. I can handle not knowing for sure right now."

When to Reach Out Urgently

Tell your treatment team promptly if anxiety is worsening, sleep is severely disrupted, or you feel unable to function safely. Seek immediate emergency help if you feel at risk of harming yourself or your baby, are unable to maintain safety, or experience hallucinations, delusions, severe confusion, paranoia, or markedly unusual or elevated behavior.

Support & Crisis Resources

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262), 24/7
Postpartum Support International HelpLine: 1-800-944-4773 (call or text)
988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988. In a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest ER