Perinatal Mood Disorders and their impact upon the health of mother and baby

A review of the literature

MOTHER

- Prevalence and symptoms of perinatal mood disorders
  - Antepartum depression/anxiety: 15-20% of pregnant women will experience moderate to severe symptoms of depression and/or anxiety.¹
  - Postpartum depression: Approximately 15% of women experience major or minor depression following childbirth.² Among lower-income women, rates of postpartum depression can be as high as 30%.³ Symptoms differ from woman to woman, but can include: feelings of anger, fear, and/or guilt, lack of interest in the baby, appetite and sleep disturbance, difficulty concentrating and/or making decisions, and possible thoughts of harming the baby or oneself.⁴
  - Postpartum Panic Disorder: This form of anxiety occurs in up to 11% of new mothers.⁵ Symptoms include feeling very nervous, recurring panic attacks, and experiencing excessive worries and/or fears.⁴
  - Postpartum Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: It is estimated that as many as 3-5% of new mothers will experience symptoms obsessive-compulsive disorder following pregnancy.⁶ Although this is one of the most misunderstood and misdiagnosed perinatal disorders, symptoms have been identified as obsessions related to the baby, compulsions, as well as a sense of horror over the obsession and/or compulsions.⁴
  - Postpartum Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: An estimated 1-6% of women experience PTSD following childbirth.⁷ Symptoms of this disorder typically include traumatic childbirth experience, reoccurring dreams and thoughts about the traumatic childbirth

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experience, avoidance of stimuli associated with the event, and persistent increased arousal such as irritability, difficulty sleeping, hypervigilance, etc.  
- Postpartum Psychosis: This disorder occurs in approximately 1 to 2 of every 1,000 deliveries. Symptoms include delusions and/or hallucinations, extreme irritability, hyperactivity, decreased need for sleep, and poor decision-making.

### BABY

- **Effects upon the fetus**
  - Fetuses of depressed mothers are smaller and have slower fetal growth rates.

- **Effects on birth measures**
  - Mothers suffering from antepartum depression are more likely to:
    - Give birth pre-term
    - Give birth to a low-birth weight baby

- **Effects upon infants and children**
  - Newborns of depressed mothers are less responsive to stimuli.
  - When not properly diagnosed and treated, perinatal mood disorders, including postpartum depression, can disrupt mother-infant bonding.
  - Depressed mothers are more likely to:
    - Miss routine pediatric and well-child visits
    - Use the emergency room as a routine source of care for their children
    - Smoke cigarettes
    - Use corporal punishment
  - When depression overwhelms a mother, she is less likely to:
    - Breastfeed
    - Follow preventive health advice for managing her children’s chronic health conditions or disabilities

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- Give her child daily vitamins\textsuperscript{16}
- Spend time smiling at and touching her infant\textsuperscript{9}

- Children whose mothers experienced antepartum depression
  - Have greater overall adiposity (i.e., overweight and obesity)\textsuperscript{17}
  - Exhibit developmental delays and behavioral and emotional problems\textsuperscript{9}
  - Suffer sleep disturbances\textsuperscript{9}

