

PERINATAL MOOD AND ANXIETY DISORDERS

THE PATH TO WELLNESS

The most successful treatment for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (depression and/or anxiety during pregnancy or first year postpartum) is a combination of self-care, social support, talk therapy, and medication if necessary.

SELF-CARE

Many new mothers need to be “mothered” during the recovery from pregnancy and childbirth. Being a new mother, caring for a newborn, and maintaining home and family are challenging, especially if mom feels anxious or depressed.

Sleep. Nutrition. Exercise. Time Off.

Sleep. Getting 4-5 hours of uninterrupted sleep is the most effective, least expensive thing a new mother can do to start feeling better. Brainstorm with partner, friends, and family how to maximize sleep. *Note: sleeping too much or not being able to sleep when baby sleeps may be signs of more serious depression or anxiety.*

Nutrition. New moms should eat every time baby eats. Water and a high-protein snack (yogurt, cheese stick, nuts) are good mini-meals.

Exercise. Gentle exercise – such as a walk around the block – can have terrific benefits. The combined effect of change of scenery, fresh air, Vitamin D from the sun, and endorphins released in the body can have a positive impact on mood.

Time off. No other job is so demanding, requiring being on duty 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. New moms need time off to recharge and rejuvenate, especially if feeling overwhelmed. The challenge is to identify and meet those needs, whether it's taking a shower, reading the newspaper, or talking with an old friend.

New mothers must care for themselves so they can care for others.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

New moms often feel the need to connect with other new mothers, especially if experiencing anxiety or depression. Peer support groups offer non-judgmental listening, support, and encouragement from others experiencing similar issues. Leaders of these support groups are caring, empathic, and have survived these illnesses.

Social support can also be practical support: providing meals, babysitting, driving older children, running errands, doing laundry, tidying the house. All of these can help diminish the pressure a new mother feels.

Postpartum Support Virginia has volunteers who provide one-on-one support via phone or email and lead FREE peer-led support groups throughout Virginia.

TALK THERAPY

New moms may need to address topics such as their role as mother, changes in relationships, and communications with partner.

Talking with an objective third party – a social worker, psychologist, or professional counselor – can help put things in perspective.

Postpartum Support Virginia maintains a list of professionals who specialize in treating women experiencing perinatal mood and anxiety disorders.

MEDICATION

Sometimes medication is needed to lessen persistent anxiety or depression. Several medications commonly used to treat anxiety or depression are widely considered safe to use during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

These medications can be prescribed by primary care physicians, obstetrician/gynecologists, or psychiatrists.

Postpartum Support Virginia maintains a list of psychiatrists who specialize in treating women experiencing perinatal mood and anxiety disorders.