

Post Partum Anxiety

By Sara Dimerman

We've heard about post partum depression, but what about post partum anxiety – is it normal?

I remember the day, as if it were yesterday, when we arrived home with our newborn for the very first time. After many hours in labour, I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I was also quite anxious. For the previous nine months I had known that my baby was safely immersed in amniotic fluid, breathing well and taken care of as best as I knew how. Now, bringing her home felt surreal. It was hard to believe that this living, breathing doll was actually ours for keeps. I was excited about becoming a parent, but I also felt overwhelmed by the mountain of information I knew had to be climbed. I tried to calm myself by remembering that my husband was not returning to work for at least a week, that my mom was close by and that I was already ahead of the game after facilitating parenting programs for a few years. Still, I couldn't help feeling daunted by what I still had to learn. Knowing that this little human being was quite literally counting on the adults in her life for survival was scary. Even the thought of changing a diaper, giving her a bath without the help of one of the nurses at the hospital and cleaning around the area where the umbilical cord was cut created a feeling of panic.

After playing house for ten days, my husband returned to work. I recall feeling a sense of panic as he left the house, knowing that it was me and me alone that our baby was reliant upon. I knew that this feeling was normal and tried to calm myself by reminders that I knew enough to get by and what I didn't know, I would figure out – on my own or with the help of friends, family or professionals.

Over the weeks and months that followed, I learnt and felt a little more confident each day and what seemed so scary at first became second nature. Heck, I could even change her diaper in the dark. I reminded myself that fears such as “what happens if I look away for a second and she drowns in the infant tub?” or “what if I'm walking down the stairs and she falls out of my arms and goes tumbling down?” were normal. Knowing that we are completely responsible for our baby's safety and well being is frightening and leads to worry about how we even place one foot in front of the other – especially at the beginning of our journey as parents. In addition to typical post natal anxieties because of the newness of the situation, we are also dealing with hormonal fluctuations and our body resetting to its pre pregnancy state. I reminded myself to be more patient and kinder to myself as well as to reduce my expectations.

Being around other parents who have children of similar ages can be comforting. Some parents are fortunate to know many in the same boat. Others may seek out information about moms and babies groups, for examples, in their community. Then, you can exchange information with other parents, feel reassured as you share stories about your experiences with one another, observe others to learn new strategies for yourself and

very importantly, enjoy and have fun with peers who are going through the same chapter of their lives as you.

Anxiety typically declines or fades as you become more confident, feel more competent in your new role and lessen feelings of being alone or isolated. However, for some, obsessive thoughts, sadness, feeling isolated or panic stricken may become more problematic and may affect your ability to function in a way that you know is best for yourself and your infant. Then, it's vital that you seek professional help from a post natal nurse, paediatrician, psychologist or other professional that has experience helping parents post partum.

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