

I Am Feeling...

A Guide of **Mental Health Resources** for Families During Pregnancy and Postpartum



Mild depression or anxiety... Pg 4

I'm looking for effective ways to cope with stress and manage my emotions.

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I'm finding it hard to feel better on my own and may benefit from some extra support.

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In need of immediate help... Pg 11

I'm having trouble caring for myself and/or my children, or I'm experiencing thoughts of harming myself, my baby, or others.



Who is this guide for?

During pregnancy and the postpartum period, it's common to experience changes in your mental health that can lead to significant stress. What you may be feeling could be part of Perinatal Mood, Anxiety, and Related Disorders (PMADs). These disorders can affect birthing parents, partners, and adoptive parents.

While welcoming a new baby is often a joyful time, it can also bring unexpected challenges. PMADs are a spectrum of mental health conditions that include depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and, in rare cases, psychosis. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and may fluctuate from day to day or week to week. This guide can help you recognize where you are in your journey and connect with the support and resources you need to help you and your family thrive.

Who does PMADS affect?

PMADs can affect anyone—not just the birthing parent. While they are more common in mothers/birthing persons, impacting up to 1 in 5 (or 20%), research shows that 10% of partners and 25% of adoptive parents also experience symptoms. These challenges can affect a person's ability to cope and enjoy life during this significant transition. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and may vary from person to person. Family members are often the first to recognize signs and play a vital role in offering support throughout treatment and recovery.



Care pathway flowchart

I am feeling mild depression or anxiety.

I'm looking for effective ways to cope with stress and manage my emotions.

- Self-care and navigation resources
- Peer support and supportive counselling
- Resources for family members or other support persons
- **More information: page 4-6**

I am feeling ongoing symptoms affecting my daily life.

I'm finding it hard to feel better on my own and may benefit from some extra support.

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), local health teams and Ontario Structured Psychotherapy (OSP) programs
- Connect with your primary care provider to discuss medication
- Online support communities and resources
- **More information: pages 7-8**

I am feeling persistent emotional distress affecting my quality of life.

I've tried supports and/or medication, but I still feel overwhelmed and unsure how to manage my emotions or ongoing thoughts.

- Specialized psychotherapy
- Follow-up with your primary care provider to discuss medication
- Visit your local Emergency Department
- **More information: page 9-10**

I am feeling in need of immediate help.

I'm having trouble caring for myself and/or my children, or I'm experiencing thoughts of harming myself, my baby, or others.

- Call 9-1-1 or visit your local hospital Emergency Department
- Call the Mental Health Crisis Line at 705-728-5044 or 1-888-893-8333
- Call or text the Suicide Hotline at 988
- **More information: page 11**

I am feeling mild depression or anxiety

Common feelings you may be experiencing:

- A lack of interest or pleasure in activities I used to enjoy
- Disconnected from my baby
- Very tired
- Sad and tearful
- Anxious or worried
- Scared
- Guilty and ashamed
- Angry, restless or irritable
- Hopeless or frustrated
- Isolated or alone



What is considered 'normal' related to mood?

Low energy, changes in appetite or sleep can be normal in pregnancy/postpartum and these symptoms may be confused with depression. Up to 80% of mothers will be emotional, irritable and worried for up to 10 days after delivery. These “baby blues” are mild and do not usually need treatment but can lead to more severe symptoms.

If symptoms last longer than two weeks, talk to your health care provider.

Where to find help

Building a strong connection to your community and identifying sources of family or social support during the pre- and postnatal period is essential. While it may feel overwhelming to get out with your new baby at first, connecting with others can offer meaningful and lasting benefits. Below are some community groups that provide valuable support for parents:

- Library programs
- [Early ON - Child and Family Centre \(earlyonpr.ca\)](http://earlyonpr.ca)
- Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)
- [Métis Nation of Ontario \(metisnation.org\)](http://metisnation.org)
- [Native Friendship Centres \(ofifc.org/friendship-centres/find/\)](http://ofifc.org/friendship-centres/find/)
- [Native Women's Association \(nwac.ca\)](http://nwac.ca)
- [After Baby Groups \(t.ly/AfterBabyGroups\)](https://t.ly/AfterBabyGroups)

Ask Masi

Handouts, booklets, websites and apps.

 askmasi.com

Life with a Baby

Build your village: Seminars, resources and community events.

 lifewithababy.com


Mother Matters: Women's College Hospital

Online mothers support group.

 womenscolleghospital.ca/care-programs/mental-health/mother-matters

Ontario 2-1-1

A free, confidential, province-wide helpline that simplifies finding support and community services for Ontario residents.

 2-1-1


Orillia Native Women's Group

Supports Indigenous women and their families through a range of programs.

 onwg.net

Postpartum Support International

Support Groups, peer support and expert chats.

 1-800-944-4773

 postpartum.net

Women & Children's Health Network

Perinatal Health and Well Being.

 wchn.ca/resourcelibrary/communityresources/perinatalhealth

Taking care of yourself

These resources aren't just for those who are pregnant or have given birth—they can be just as helpful for anyone experiencing symptoms of PMADs. When thinking about how to care for your mental health, consider the acronym **BREATHE** as a helpful guide:

B	R	E	A	T	H	E
BE KIND TO YOURSELF	REFLECT WITHOUT PRESSURE	EAT NOURISHING FOOD	ASK FOR HELP	TAKE BREAKS	HYDRATE	ENGAGE IN THINGS THAT BRING YOU PEACE
Treat yourself with the same compassion, care and respect you would give to a child, an elder or the land. Let yourself rest without guilt, knowing your body is doing powerful work.	Reflection is not about fixing, it's about listening. Hold space for your thoughts and feelings. Without rushing, judgement or the need to "get it right". Let go of the idea that strength means doing everything alone or quickly.	Food is not just fuel, it's a gift from the land. Eating nourishing food in the perinatal period means more than meeting physical needs; it means honouring your body, connecting with your culture and restoring balance with what you take in.	Honour your limits and know that asking for help is a strength, not a weakness.	There is a time for giving and a time for receiving; time for movement and time for stillness. "take breaks" honours the natural pace of your body, especially during the journey of pregnancy, birth and parenting.	Carry water with you as a way of honouring your needs and staying rooted in balance. Be gentle with yourself if you forget or struggle - each drink is a new beginning.	Create a peaceful moment for yourself, whether in laughter, quiet, creativity or spiritual practice. Say no to what drains you and yes to what restores you - even in small ways.

How to support your partner/support person

- Allow each other time to focus on self-care
- Set clear boundaries with friends and family
- Spend time together
- Do the cooking and cleaning or ask family and friends to help
- Offer food and beverages during feeding sessions and listen when your partner/support person is upset or having a difficult time
- Communicate! Talk to each other about how you feel and what you need
- Write down an action plan or a list of daily "to dos" so that you are both on the same page

Resources for partner/support person

Fathers' Mental Health Network

Support, resources and treatment for fathers (referral required)

[fathersmentalhealth.com](https://www.fathersmentalhealth.com)

Postpartum Support International

Help, support and resources for dads

[postpartum.net/get-help/help-for-dads/](https://www.postpartum.net/get-help/help-for-dads/)

Dad Central

New Dad Manual Developed by fathers for fathers

[dadcentral.ca/newdadmanual/](https://www.dadcentral.ca/newdadmanual/)

I am feeling ongoing symptoms affecting my daily life

Common feelings you may be experiencing:

- Bouts of crying
- Sleep disturbances
- Loss of appetite
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Feeling depressed or irritable much of the time
- Fatigue, apathy or loss of energy
- Poor concentration
- Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence
- Avoiding going out
- Frightening intrusive thoughts or images
- Obsessive thoughts or behaviours
- Negative feelings about parenthood
- Negative feelings towards the baby

If you are experiencing some or all of these symptoms, please reach out for help. Ask a friend or family member for support or check out the “**Where to Find Help**” section for resources.

*If the feelings highlighted in **red** are intensifying or becoming a daily occurrence please reach out to your primary care provider as soon as possible or call the **Mental Health Crisis Line** at **705-728-5044** or **1-888-893-8333**.



Where to find help

Psychotherapy/Counselling


NSM Health Line

North Simcoe Muskoka counselling for couple or individual.

 nsmhealthline.ca/listServices.aspx?id=10232

Ontario Structured Psychotherapy (Waypoint)

Offers a free, 6-8 week individual Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy program specifically designed for individuals 18+, in the perinatal stage (Up to 36 weeks pregnant or 4-30 weeks postpartum).

 1-877-341-4729 x2883

 osp@waypointcentre.ca


 therapyontario.ca

Support

Community-based organizations provide a place for new families to meet others and create new forms of support.

Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program

HBHC is a free, voluntary home visiting program for eligible families who may benefit from additional support during pregnancy or any time up until their children begin school. Visits with a Public Health Nurse (PHN) and Family Home Visitor (FHV) to families in many ways including: having a healthy pregnancy, adjusting to postpartum changes and parenthood, taking care of oneself as a parent, supporting parents to build strong connections with their infants and young children, breastfeeding, nutrition, safety, accessing available community resources and more. Contact HBHC to see if the program is right for you and your family.

 705-721-7520 x6850

 smdhu.org/hbhc

Chigamik Community Health Centre

Indigenous Perinatal Mental Health Program, Traditional Healing, Mama Tribe Program.

 chigamik.ca/en/services/allied-health

Medications

Certain medications can be safely taken during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. Talk to your healthcare provider to determine what's best for you. Antidepressants are not addictive, and your primary care provider can help you make an informed decision about treatment options.

I am feeling persistent emotional distress affecting my quality of life

Important: If you are experiencing any of these feelings it is time to reach out for help. These conditions are not your fault. You are not alone, and there is help. Please contact your primary care provider and talk openly about these feelings.

Common feelings you may be experiencing:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood most of the day, nearly every day, for at least 2 weeks
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Being restless or having trouble sitting still
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Physical aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not have a clear physical cause and do not go away with treatment
- Trouble bonding or forming an emotional attachment with the baby
- Persistent doubts about the ability to care for the baby

If you are having thoughts about harming yourself or your baby, get help right away. Call the **Mental Health Crisis Line** at **1-888-893-8333** or go to the **nearest hospital Emergency Department**.




Can PMADs happen to anyone?

PMADs can happen to either parent and adoptive parents. 1 in 5 Canadian women experience PMADs and 1 in 10 Canadian men experience PMADs. They can begin in pregnancy or up to one year after the birth or the adoption of a baby. **These conditions are not your fault. You are not alone, and there is help.** The treatment for PMADs may include a combination of self-care, getting support from family and friends, medications, and therapy.

Where to find help

Canadian Mental Health Association Simcoe County

Telephone crisis line for youth and adults experiencing a personal crisis. Services available 24 hours, 7 days a week. Call to speak with a professionally trained mental health and addictions counsellor.

 1-888-893-8333

 cmhastarttalking.ca

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Answers questions about your prenatal health or other health topics. Information is available 24/7.

 simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/PP2B/PregnancyBirthPostpartum/HelpAndSupportPrenatal

Women & Children's Health Network


For information about prenatal health or other topics.

 wchn.ca

Specialized Treatment Services

Outpatient Assessment and Treatment Services program (OATS)

Ask your primary care provider about the OATS program at Waypoint. Referrals to OATS must be completed by a Primary Care Provider.

 waypointcentre.ca/services/outpatient-assessment-and-treatment-service

Medication

Follow up with your primary care provider if you're considering medication. It can take time for medication to take effect, and finding the right one may require a few tries. If you're not noticing improvement, speak with your provider about other options. It's normal for these conversations to feel difficult—consider bringing a trusted friend or family member with you for support.

I am feeling in need of immediate help!

Common feelings you may be experiencing:

- I am having difficulty taking care of myself and/or my children
- I am having thoughts or intent to harm myself, my baby or others
- I am experiencing moments of extreme restlessness or anger
- My behaviours are disruptive, unsafe or out of the ordinary
- I am experiencing confusion
- I am having extreme mood swings
- I am having difficulty connecting with reality

If you or your loved one are experiencing any of these symptoms please reach out for help immediately.

Postpartum psychosis: “A severe PMAD”

Postpartum Psychosis is a rare but serious mental health condition that can develop in the days or weeks after childbirth. It may include symptoms such as delusions, confusion, extreme mood swings, and disorganized thinking. In some cases, it can involve thoughts of harming yourself, your baby, or others.

If you or someone you love is experiencing symptoms of postpartum psychosis, know that it is NOT your fault—and help is available. Seek immediate medical attention by going to your local Emergency Department or calling 9-1-1.

Where to find help

- Call **9-1-1**
- Visit your local hospital **Emergency Department**
- Call the **Mental Health Crisis Line** at **705-728-5044** or **1-888-893-8333**
- Call the Suicide Hotline at **9-8-8**

References

Barrie Area Native Advisory Circle: banac.on.ca/lifecycle-wheel/

Care Pathway for the Management of Perinatal Mental Health: pcmch.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/PCMCH-Care-Pathway-for-the-Management-of-Perinatal-Mental-Health_23July2021.pdf

Feelings Pathway: 1door.ca/feelings-pathways#DownloadGuides

It's Not Always Easy! Your Guide to Mood Changes When Pregnant, Postpartum or Parenting: osmh.on.ca/uploads/2019/05/Printable_PMD-Booklet_ENG-1.pdf

Perinatal Depression: nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/perinatal-depression

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders: simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/PP2B/PregnancyBirthPostpartum/Postpartum/PerinatalMoodAnxietyDisorders

Perinatal Mental Health Help and Support: simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/PP2B/PregnancyBirthPostpartum/HelpAndSupportPerinatalMentalHealth#

Quick Tips for Emotional Wellness During Pregnancy and After Childbirth: postpartum.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1E-White-and-Smith-Quick-Tips-for-Emotional-Wellness-Handout.pdf

Well for Culture: wellforculture.com/

What Is Postpartum Psychosis?: postpartumdepression.org/postpartum-psychosis/

