

Suggestions for Maternal Caregivers

Specific ways to assist in the Postpartum Period

Prevention

Whenever possible, assess maternal risk during prenatal interview so that resources can be lined up before the birth.

Have resources already researched and on hand

Find out which doctors and counselors in your area specialize in PPMDs, their availability and reputation for quality of care; as well as schedules and locations of community support group meetings.

Assist in gathering social support

Encourage mom to join a playgroup, set up a rotating “meal wagon” amongst family and friends, make use of the “Grandmother”, etc.

Encourage healthy habits

- Daily showers are a bonus in the first few weeks after birth.
- Help mother maximize the amount of sleep she gets.
Good quality REM sleep is critical in reducing PPMDs.
- Help parents prioritize tasks, letting go some things (such as a tidy house) in place of other things (such as sleep).
- Give them “permission” to use paper plates and take-out/delivery!
- Make sure her diet keeps her blood sugar up.
Hypoglycemia compounds the symptoms of PPMDs.
Discuss having lots of simple, whole-food meals and snacks to nourish the family.
- Make sure the mother is staying hydrated (especially if breastfeeding).

Make sure breastfeeding is going well

Breastfeeding helps to prevent depression unless there are problems.

- Breastfeeding activates oxytocin with its healing and calming effects.
- Must get help for BF problems as soon as possible.
- Do not abruptly stop breastfeeding—this can precipitate depression.
(If mother has to stop, gradually wean).
- Make sure that antidepressant medications that are compatible with breastfeeding.

Postpartum Mood Disorders

Ideas for Prevention and Treatment

Issues to explore with the new mother

Assure the mother that her symptoms are temporary and treatable

Explain that this is a treatable chemical imbalance, and that she is not alone (1 in 4 or 5 women experience this). It is important to remember that a parent who is experiencing symptoms may feel very frightened and vulnerable. It can be a relief to have these concerns brought up in a thoughtful way and to learn that she can recover quickly and soon be able to enjoy her baby.

Help Moms who do not know what to expect

Some women worry about providers thinking they are bad mothers

They can't understand why they feel so bad when everyone says they should feel so happy. Strongly assure her that having PPMO does not mean that she is a bad mother. In fact, seeking help proves that she is responsible and cares for her child's wellbeing.

Legitimize and normalize what she may be feeling

Validate and accept her fears, anger, and sadness during this turbulent time

Encourage her to explore treatment options by using reflective listening as well as providing information about postpartum mood disorders.

Help mother and partner have realistic expectations and priorities

Remind the entire family how a baby will alter their lifestyle. Validate their progress: comment on how well they have done to accomplish feeding themselves and getting some sleep. Reassure them that this overload state is temporary and will get better as they adjust to their new life with baby.

Recognize the mother's strengths: Encouragement and praise

Offer sincere praise for every accomplishment no matter how seemingly small, to boost her self-esteem and sense of competency as a mother. **Example praises:** "Your baby knows you so well! See how he calms when you hold him." "You're a natural at this!" "See how your baby loves to look into your eyes as you feed her!" "I'm so glad you are taking care of you (sleep, a walk, reading, a bubble bath). You're so wise to know you can't give from an empty cup."

Know your limitations

Postpartum helpers or doulas are usually very empathetic. Well-meaning caregivers in this profession want to make a difference and may push a little too hard. Understand that if mom is not ready to receive help (like medications and therapy), all you can do is respect her current decision and support her in ways that she can accept (like providing rest breaks and meals). Just let her know that you are there for her when she is ready to take further steps.

Emotional support and respect are still the foundation for the healing process