


# Women Who Develop Mental Health or Substance Use Conditions Within a Year of Giving Birth



The arrival of a new baby is often a joyous time for pregnant persons and their families, but it can also be very stressful. You may experience lots of changes to your physical, emotional, and mental health. During the year after delivery, individuals can be vulnerable to a range of mental and substance use conditions. Early diagnosis and management of postpartum mental health and substance use conditions are vital for the health of the mother and the baby. About 15% of mothers experience postpartum psychiatric conditions like depression, anxiety, or psychosis. These mental health conditions can significantly impact all aspects of a mother's life and interactions, including with the infant, partner, and family.

## ***What my provider should know about me (mental health provider, primary care practitioner, gynecologist)***

- My current and past medical history
- My current and past history of mental health conditions and use of substances, including tobacco and alcohol
- My current and past diagnoses and mental health challenges
- My life circumstances and conditions
- My goals for my mental health and well-being
- My pregnancy history (including infertility or pregnancy loss and other medical complications)
- Any other medical conditions
- My current and past medication names and dosages and any side effects
- My current and past vitamins, supplements, and over-the-counter medication names

- Medications or other treatments that have helped the most with my mental health and substance use
- Any economic or financial issues, including housing stability, food security, and job security
- If I don't have health insurance or have concerns about my health insurance
- The kind of support I should expect from family, partner, friends, and community during and after pregnancy
- If I am breastfeeding my newborn

## ***What should I ask my provider?***

- How will treatment for my mental health or substance use challenges impact me?
- What mental health symptoms might I experience during postpartum?
- How do I know if I need therapy or other mental health treatment?
- What are the risks and benefits of my current medicines while breastfeeding?
- What risks are associated with not continuing my current medications or other treatments?
- What other medication treatments or non-medication treatments might be helpful during postpartum?
- Are there any support groups you recommend that I join?
- Are there any resources that would be helpful, and who can help me find them?
- Under what circumstances would my provider reach out to Child Protective Services?

## Things to do

- If you are experiencing mental health or substance use symptoms, seek help from a mental health provider. Also, contact your primary care provider.
- Discuss your treatment options with your mental health and other health care providers. The benefits of continuing medications may outweigh the risk of stopping medications. Any decision about medications should be made carefully by you and your provider.
- Learn more about your mental health conditions. Being knowledgeable can help you stick to your treatment plan. Some useful and reliable websites include:
  - **American Psychiatric Association:** [psychiatry.org](https://www.psychiatry.org)
  - **National Institute on Mental Health:** [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov)
  - **National Institute on Drug Abuse:** [nida.nih.gov](https://www.nida.nih.gov)
  - **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:** [niaaa.nih.gov](https://www.niaaa.nih.gov)
- Seek support from your partner, family, friends, and community for childcare.
- Consider taking a second opinion if you feel your needs are not met.
- Get involved in decision-making about your treatment plan by talking to your healthcare providers.
- Inform your provider if you have any transportation issues.
- Let your provider know if you have difficulty scheduling and/or keeping appointments.
- Consider whether you might benefit from additional counseling or support groups.
- Learn about safe sleep practices and the advantages and disadvantages of breastfeeding.

- Learn about safe breastfeeding practices:
  - Discuss the risk and benefits of medications with your provider.
  - Inquire about relevant educational resources and support groups.
- Practice self-care: Manage stress with tools such as meditation or yoga, a healthy diet, exercise, and enough sleep.
- If you have suicidal thoughts or concerns for your immediate safety, call 911.

## More information

- **MGH Center for Women's Mental Health:** [womensmentalhealth.org/specialty-clinics](https://www.womensmentalhealth.org/specialty-clinics)
- **Postpartum Support International:** [postpartum.net](https://www.postpartum.net)
- **MotherToBaby:** [mothersmilk.com](https://www.mothersmilk.com)
- **National Maternal Mental Health Hotline:** [mchb.hrsa.gov/national-maternal-mental-health-hotline](https://mchb.hrsa.gov/national-maternal-mental-health-hotline)
- **CDC Hear Her Campaign:** [cdc.gov/hearher/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/hearher/index.html)
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness:** [nami.org](https://www.nami.org)

