



Pacific Post Partum Support Society

200 – 7342 Winston St, Burnaby, BC V5A 2H1 Canada
Telephone Support: 604-255-7999 www.postpartum.org

Postpartum Depression & Anxiety: Practical Suggestions

Take frequent breaks.

Every person who is in a paying job gets coffee breaks and a lunch break, but mothers usually don't. Carve out the time for at least one break a day from your mothering duties. A break can be as simple and brief as sitting down for a cup of tea or taking a bath. Having lunch with a friend and taking a walk are other suggestions; or exploring bookstores (without a book-destroying toddler in tow).

Closely related to taking breaks is the issue of getting a babysitter. Getting a babysitter is often a big turning point. It is saying that you deserve to have one and yet everyone is different in their comfort level with having someone look after their babies. Finding a way to do this that works for you is important and it may be that you start by having a family member babysit or that you stay home while the babysitter is there until you feel more comfortable leaving the house.

Do good things for yourself.

Make a point of it, scheduling a time slot if necessary. This should be something you would like to do, not something you feel you should do. Suitable activities include getting a new haircut; buying clothes for yourself; getting a massage; learning or resuming some creative work such as embroidery, crochet, or music.

Give your difficult emotions air time.

Allow yourself to grieve, to feel sad, to feel angry. We often try to “think positively” and end up censoring out “bad” feelings, thus prolonging them. Grieving, if unhindered, takes its own natural course and then can often be left behind. Tears can be healing and can actually relieve stress.

Conduct an active search for your good feelings, however fleeting they may be.

This is not the same as what is generally called “positive thinking”, which implies superimposing a ready-made cheerful attitude over our real feelings. What is meant instead is noticing and cultivating genuine feelings of contentment, joy, love and happiness when they arise.

Develop a support system for yourself.

Try out mothers' groups, programs at community centers, family places, babysitting co-ops, and so forth, with a view toward taking care of yourself and sharing with other mothers.

Find ways to get angry safely.

This means giving oneself permission to be angry in a safe way without taking it out on another person and without other serious repercussions. Feelings of anger may range from mild irritation, resentment, or frustration to profound rage, so you will have to find the outlet which works best for you. Anything goes so long as the anger is not misdirected or harmful. Some suggested ways are screaming into a pillow and running up and down stairs or around the block. Writing extremely honest letters, not meant to be mailed, may be enough. It may be that telling someone how you feel and why you are angry will help. Often, anger is diminished gradually over time once we acknowledge it and express it. But it can be difficult to express anger safely and sometimes we need help in order to learn more about how to deal with it. The first step is usually letting someone know that it is a problem. There are many programs in the community that offer educational courses in anger management if you feel that it is not subsiding or feels out of control.

Give yourself credit.

Mothering is probably the greatest challenge that most people will ever have to meet, especially in a society where we are often separated from our extended families. In spite of this, there is little social recognition of the immense contribution which mothers make. There's often not even any recognition that mothering is work, let alone of the amount of work involved. Jobs that are esteemed by society are rewarded by a wage and holidays. But mothering isn't rewarded in any of these usual ways.

Set small goals for yourself.

When you come up against a stumbling block, break down the steps you need to get over it and work on them one at a time. Make one phone call to a prospective babysitter this week and follow through next week, if you are having a hard time getting around to taking a break. Go for a one-block walk at first if getting out of the house seems impossible. If you can never sit still, first try sitting down and breathing deeply for a moment, then gradually increase the length of time you are able to rest. If you surpass your initial goal, consider the extra accomplishment a bonus. An overall bit of advice which PPPSS offers is to "Make your plans but don't plan the results".

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You may make plans and be looking forward to something, and then find that the event doesn't turn out as planned. For example you may go to great lengths to get a babysitter so that you can have lunch with a friend and then the friend may have to cancel the lunch. If this happens try to you enjoy what you can, and go out by yourself. It will not be what you planned, however you can still get something good out of it.