

Tips for prevention and recovery

- Adjust your expectations. Having a baby is a big change and it is normal to feel unsure at first, do not be hard on yourself.
- Seek support from family and friends. Get help with tasks, express your worries and discuss your options.
- Talk about other topics, and you may realise there are many other things in life that matter. Learn to give attention to the positives.
- Practise doing one thing at a time. Keep yourself occupied, but focus on one thing at a time so you can give your full attention to the task.
- Have regular breaks where you get to unwind, engage in deep breathing, listen to your favourite music, go for a walk, or any activity that helps you to relax.

Contact us

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Perinatal Anxiety Disorder



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PATIENTS. AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO.

■ What is Perinatal Anxiety Disorder

Having a baby is a life event that can be both joyful and stressful. During the pregnancy and postnatal period, many women experience some feelings of uncertainty, worry or stress. These feelings may be brief and resolve after some assurance from loved ones or healthcare providers. However, about 10 percent of women may experience anxiety that may affect their daily lives. These moderate to severe cases of anxiety may be diagnosed as Perinatal Anxiety Disorder.

■ What causes Perinatal Anxiety Disorder

Research shows there are multiple causes such as genetic predisposition, anxious personality, unexpected stressful circumstances, etc. Having a difficult past experience may make the current pregnancy changes seem especially worrying or scary. First-time mothers may be overwhelmed with new responsibilities and demands during the transition to motherhood, and they feel ill-equipped to handle the baby without prior experience.



■ Symptoms of Perinatal Anxiety may include



Feeling stressed or tensed at most times



Being occupied with worries



Constant worry about baby's health and well-being, despite baby being fine



Excessive checking behaviours (e.g. Checking multiple times in an hour as to whether baby is still breathing)



Unable to relax or sleep well due to worries or repeated checking of baby



Feeling fearful of handling baby



Indecisiveness, due to worrying about scenarios that have yet to happen



Panic attacks (e.g. Intense episodes of heart palpitations, shortness of breath, chest tightness, dizziness, numbness, extreme fear)

■ What are the treatment options

Treatment is important because continued anxiety affects the mother's physical and mental health, as well as the bond between mother and child. If left untreated, it may also affect the child's emotional and cognitive development.

An anxiety disorder is not a condition the person can "just snap out of" or "just stop thinking". Professional assessment by a perinatal psychiatrist is required before the recommendation of treatment options.

Medication

Doctors may prescribe medication to treat the anxiety disorder, and options are available for pregnant or breastfeeding mothers. In some cases, the anxiety may be so intense that therapy would not be effective without medication for interim management. Discuss any concerns with your doctor, so you can collaboratively work out the best treatment plan for your situation.

Psychotherapy

One type of psychotherapy known as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has been proven to be effective in treating anxiety. By learning ways to change your thoughts, behaviour and reaction in certain situations, you learn to be less anxious and fearful.

Mother-infant therapy

In situations where the mother is very fearful of handling her baby or the mother-infant bond had been disrupted by illness, it can be helpful to have mother-infant therapy sessions, whereby the mother is encouraged to observe her baby's cues and learns how to enjoy the process of interacting with her baby.

Relaxation techniques

Practising relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation can be a useful way to calm the mind and body. Done regularly, it is like resetting your "stress meter" so that the effects of stress do not accumulate to unmanageable levels.