



**Ask the Expert**

*Arizona Republic*

**Q: Six weeks ago, I gave birth to my daughter. Since then, I've been feeling sad and alone, and sometimes quite anxious. Are these feelings normal?**

**A:** In a perfect world, all mothers give birth to their baby and it's instantly the happiest time of their lives. But in reality, nearly 80 percent of all women who have a baby suffer from some form of baby blues.

If you experience fatigue, anxiety, mood swings, irritability or loneliness for more than two weeks, or if your feelings have intensified, I suggest you visit your physician for an evaluation. There are a variety of postpartum mood disorders that affect nearly 25 percent of all postpartum women. Among them are:

- **Postpartum depression:** This is one of the most common mood disorders experienced by women, and it may occur at any time during the first year after delivery. Symptoms may include a lack of engagement in normal activities, in addition to experiencing sadness, anxiety, insomnia, anger or feelings of guilt.
- **Postpartum panic disorder:** This is characterized by the sudden onset of panic attacks, shortness of breath, chest pain, a fear of dying and a fear of going crazy. Many women are undiagnosed because most new mothers experience symptoms of anxiety.
- **Postpartum obsessive-compulsive disorder:** This is a condition that often goes undiagnosed. Women suffering from this disorder have obsessions or compulsions, such as repeatedly washing their hand, and have possible unwanted thoughts about harming their baby. They experience intense feelings and guilt about their thoughts. The treatment for these conditions include therapy and, in some cases, hospitalization or medication therapy.
- **Postpartum psychosis:** This disorder may cause hallucinations, delusions and confusion. Treatment for this disorder should be sought immediately. Because this is a more intense condition, hospitalization, medication therapy and counseling may be required.

If you believe that you may have one of these conditions, please speak to your physician as soon as possible or call the National Hopeline Network at 1.800.784.2433. If left untreated, your symptoms may progress or become chronic. And remember, you're not alone. CHW's Perinatal Mood Disorder support group meets each Monday from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., at Mercy Gilbert Medical Center, located at 3555 South Val Vista Drive, and each Wednesday from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., in the Morrison Building on Chandler Regional Medical Center's campus, located at 1875 West Frye Road. Free child care is also available should you need it.



Catholic Healthcare West



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