

My Postpartum Struggle

by Sarah Pond

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Part One: The Journey In

The third day after my daughter's birth, a vortex of dark, deafening, and terminally sinister energy swallowed me whole. It sounds dramatic and it was. It overcame me in the car on the way home from the hospital. My baby slept soundly in her carseat, blissfully unaware that her primary caregiver was beginning a freefall into a churning turmoil. I remember commenting to my husband that I was suddenly not feeling too well. An understatement, to be sure.

Every moment after that, I struggled in the teeth of a malevolent beast, while desperately attempting to keep up the appearance of a happy, serene mommy. It felt like a struggle of life and death proportions.

I suppose it was.

At the 5 month mark, when sleep deprivation was becoming debilitating, I made an appointment with my (former) family doctor. She gave me the following advice: Get some rest, eat more fatty foods and don't spoil the baby. She neither mentioned PPD nor asked me any relevant questions, nor suggested any resources. The appointment lasted all of six minutes. I timed it.

I kept on going, not following the doctor's advice.

At last, on a Saturday afternoon, when my daughter was 7 months old, I crashed hard and ended up at the medical clinic trembling, pale and unable to form a cohesive thought. I hadn't slept at all for three days and nights. I hadn't had more than 3 hours of consecutive sleep for half a year. My husband took our baby to his mother's, drove me to the clinic and insisted that we see somebody NOW. A short time later, I was sitting in front of a very kind, compassionate and helpful doctor, asking him for immediate help. Looking back, I know that I was very close to being hospitalized. Instead, the doctor, bless him, sent me home with three prescriptions: one for antidepressants (Zoloft, 50mgs, safest for breastfeeding), another for a sleep aid (Imovain, 30mgs), and a final one to do whatever it takes to get some decent sleep.

That night, with a lot of support from my husband and some pumping of milk, I slept for five hours straight. The next night it was six. After an entire week of sleeping "through the night", I was on the road to healing. By the time my baby was 10 months old, I was a new woman.

Part Two: The Journey Out

Recovery has been a path of ups and downs, of good days and bad. But no days have ever come close to the darkest days of all, when my perceptions were distorted by anxiety, fear and sleeplessness. When the primary emotion I felt toward my beautiful child was pity, for having such an inadequate mother. When I felt the hot breath of those notorious black dogs of despair on my throat, heard their hungry snarling, and knew that I was their weakening prey prey.

These days, 15 months postpartum and 5 months post-PPD, pretty much every day is good. Great, even.

I have found a new balance. All the balls I juggle as a mother, a wife, an employee, friend, family member and upstanding citizen are staying miraculously aloft (WooHoo!). I practice self-care and I make it a priority. Most of all I enjoy mothering my little girl as I have never enjoyed anything else. I look at her now and I know that she has a good mother – one who loves her and nurtures her as best she can.

During the worst of it, I tried natural therapies, such as herbal remedies and homeopathy. While these took the edge off the most severe symptoms, it was the antidepressants that ended up saving me. The journey through PPD is unique for each of us and so are the ways we heal. I don't advocate any particular method of finding balance; I simply share my own passage. Until this experience, I was resistant to pharmaceuticals such as antidepressants. Now, I feel fortunate that such drugs are available and that they worked so effectively for me.

The best and most important therapy for me, was reaching out for help. Finding the guts to talk to other mothers about what I was going through opened the doors that lead me to health. It was other mamas who inspired and guided my way.

Now my wish is to do the same.

Part Three: The Centre of the Labyrinth

Some of the symptoms of my postpartum experience were:

Physical

- Insomnia
- Jittery, shaky
- No appetite
- Weight loss
- Low milk supply
- Adrenalin surging constantly
- "Fight or flight" mode all the time

Mental

- Inability to turn off my mommy-brain, which was running at 1000 RPM. Like an engine revving way too high in the lowest gear
- Loud clamoring noise in my head at all times, especially at night when everyone else was asleep
- Uncontrollable intrusive thoughts of harm coming to my baby (from earthquakes, wild animals, disease, car accidents, intruders, electrocution, drowning, choking, SIDS, etc, etc, etc)
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing
- mental fogginess, sluggishness
- Nightmares

Emotional

- Anxiety about everything to do with my baby
- Terrible, awful apprehension when the baby cried
- Extreme discomfort when I was separated from my baby
- Feeling certain that I was a terrible mother

- Pity toward my baby for having such a terrible mother
- Fear of harm coming to my baby
- Fear of dying and my baby being left motherless
- Exhausting mood swings between the elation and joy of loving my child and despair and anxiety over my perceived inability to care properly for her
- Anger and resentment towards my husband
- Guilt, guilt, and more guilt
- Dread
- Rage
- Heartfelt desire to live in a secluded cave with only me and my baby

Behavioural

- Crying fits
- Micro-managing everything
- Not allowing anyone else to care for my baby
- Not taking any breaks
- Unable to relax
- Raging at my husband, up to and including threatening divorce
- Obsessive coping behaviours, such as counting to 500 while soothing my crying baby
- Clinging inflexibly to routines
- Insisting that things to do with the baby be done EXACTLY SO and freaking out when it wasn't

Please reach out for help if you think that you need it. And if you think you MIGHT need it, too.

Mama-blessings,

Sarah Pond

Co-founder,

mama2mama: support & awareness for postpartum mamas

<http://mamalove.org>

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