

# Feelings of Anxiety:

## A guide for Pregnancy & Postpartum



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**PERINATAL ANXIETY & BIRTH TRAUMA SUPPORT - EMERGING MOTHERS Postpartum Groups - YOGA**

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# Why do I feel anxious?

This isn't what I expected.  
I love my baby so much,  
but I just don't feel like myself.

You may have always wanted a baby, or maybe this baby came as a surprise. You might have a history of anxious feelings, or perhaps this experience has taken you off guard.

**First of all, there is nothing "wrong" with you.**

There is nothing you did to make this happen, and you cannot just use positive thinking to find your way out of feeling anxious. Pregnancy and parenting are times of tremendous growth and an opportunity to challenge many preconceived notions about ourselves. *This process takes tremendous energy, courage and love.*



Many women are surprised at the different feelings that they experience during pregnancy and early motherhood. Our idealized images of motherhood, don't often take into account the fact that parenting is *very hard work, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally too.* There may be days when you feel like you are coping well, and others when you can barely get off the couch.

Today, women are used to being able to apply themselves to tasks and jobs. We work hard and get good, predictable results. When we don't know what to do, and we don't get consistent feedback on our performance, we can often feel anxiety, self-doubt and lack of motivation. Motherhood requires a different and new mindset – one where we see small, everyday things as milestones and celebrations. *We aren't used to seeing ourselves this way.*

## You might also feel anxious when...

*...You are exhausted. Our bodies often compensate for exhaustion by releasing adrenaline to help us cope.*

*...You had a difficult or traumatic birth that made you feel like you lost control or faith in yourself*

*...Your baby is fussy, you aren't sure if you are doing the "right" things, and she is not how you pictured her to be*

*...Your relationship with your with your partner or other children has changed and you wonder if things will be good again*

*...You are used to being able to manage daily life and now you feel unable to do even the simplest tasks because of lack of time, energy or motivation*

## What does Anxiety feel like?

Every woman experiences anxiety differently and to varying degrees, but here are some common ways women describe how anxiety feels:

***The Anxiety Treadmill:*** "I'm always thinking about something and my mind goes off on tangents. Before I know it, I feel anxious and out of control. Then I feel exhausted from all of the adrenaline"

***Anger and Frustration:*** "I find myself getting angry at little things. My patience is almost non-existent"

***Insomnia:*** "As soon as I lie down, I feel my brain kicks into high gear. In the quiet of the night, it is almost impossible for me to fall asleep."

**Physical pain and tension:** "My shoulders and upper back hurt. I get a massage, but it only lasts a day before I feel sore again."

**Not good enough:** "I should be able to handle my baby. My mom never felt this. Why can't I cope?"

**Feeling scattered** and "too energetic"

**Missing out:** "I am so caught up in feeling stressed that I worry that I am missing the joyful moments with my baby."

## What if I have scary thoughts?

Maybe you can't get a certain thought out of your head. Scary thoughts can be accompanied by vivid, often irrational images and even physical sensations such as...

- ...Fear of something **happening to baby**
- ...Fear of hurting baby by **accident**
- ...Fear of **someone else hurting baby**
- ...Fear that **you might hurt baby**

Many women experience these thoughts, and a *very few* ever harm their babies. It can be very distressing! It takes so much courage to talk about these thoughts, but they often lose power when we share them and ask for help.

You might worry that someone will take your baby away. This almost never happens, except in extreme cases where baby is in imminent danger. Most caseworkers want to set up more support for you so that you can heal and care for your baby. I have seen so many wonderful outcomes in situations like these. Women often come out of this experience with greater self-awareness, more realistic expectations of themselves and others and a strong desire to help other women.

# How do I know if my experience is normal?



*Normal* is a faint and often changing line in the sand. Focus on what is *normal for you*. Even women going through what are considered “normal” adjustments seek extra support or use different tools to help them on their journey. The goal is not to be a perfect mom, but a happier mom, so that you can enjoy your baby and your new life as much as possible.

For some women, it is important to receive a diagnosis and review different treatment options. Visit the Life With a New Baby checklist below for a list of different symptoms. This list will give you a general idea of how severe your symptoms are.

This tool will give you a good starting ground for a conversation with your health care provider. ([http://www.lifewithnewbaby.ca/resources/EPDS\\_checklist\\_eng.pdf](http://www.lifewithnewbaby.ca/resources/EPDS_checklist_eng.pdf) )

## Why do other women seem happier?

### **I call this “the comparison monster”**



As women, we often strive to do everything well and look at ourselves under a microscope. After spending many years in this field, I know that there are *many* women who are feeling just like you are and are perhaps not comfortable expressing themselves. There are women you may never see because they are unable to cope enough to get out and interact with other mothers.

# What can I do to feel better?

*Most women benefit from a consistent support person who helps them navigate their emotions and connect with the appropriate supports.*

**Talk about it!** Talk to good friends who will not judge you.

**Get ongoing support** from a counselor, coach or therapist

**Exercise, even a little.** It increases endorphins and helps move the nervous energy in your body

**Get some sleep.** Even stretches of 3 hours can make a difference. Use a noise machine, take a warm bath, do some yoga, anything that calms you enough rest.

**Learn to rest the body and mind.** There are many tools including meditation, yoga and deep relaxation. Visit [www.birthwithcare.com](http://www.birthwithcare.com) for upcoming classes suitable to all levels

**Break your isolation** - Join a support Group or other activities. Isolation can be the hardest thing about being a new mother. A list of mom groups are listed under the resources section of this booklet.

## How can I help my partner understand ?

It is normal for partners to not truly understand, and perhaps it is hard for them to really know what you are feeling. Partners may also feel frustrated, confused and worried. They benefit greatly from support as well.



Your partner is often motivated to help you feel better. Here are some tips to open the dialogue and ask for support:

**Be specific:** Ask for practical things that you need even if you feel “selfish”. You might ask him to leave breakfast for you in the morning, or run you a bath every night. Small gestures of nurturing add up!

**Share information:** Great websites for dads are [www.newdadmanual.ca](http://www.newdadmanual.ca) & [www.postpartumdads.org](http://www.postpartumdads.org)

**Keep him/her in the loop** with how you’re doing, doctor appointments, treatments etc.

## *When will I feel better?*

**By far, this is the most common question I hear from all mothers.** First of all, it is important to acknowledge your desire to get better. This is a sign that you are motivated to get well. For some women, they begin to feel better gradually over a few weeks as they get additional emotional and practical support. For others, it is a gradual process where bad days are less frequent and shorter and good days come more often.

## *Can I just get through this on my own?*

Birth and motherhood can bring up all kinds of questions. Working with women to help them feel more relaxed and confident is what I do best.

Many women hold their breath and wait for things to get better. In the meantime, we often feel like we aren’t enjoying our babies and feel full of guilt. As a doula, mother and Perinatal Wellness Coach, I have supported hundreds of women over the past 14 years.

# How does pre/postnatal coaching feel?

## **Feel heard. Feel validated. Feel Supported.**

Most clients express a feeling of relief after our first session together, knowing they will get the support they need. You can expect to experience a lively dialogue in which you feel deeply listened to, by someone who has lots of experience with what they are going through, but still has a genuine interest in your unique needs. My clients often say they feel *stronger, clearer, more optimistic*, and less muddled in confusion and self-doubt. It is a creative process where we talk about options, feelings and choices, in a way that is evidence based, but also heart-centered.

**Gain self-awareness, learn to cope.** I use tools ranging from relaxation, to yoga or meditation, and elements of solution-focused coaching. No experience with yoga or meditation is needed. All you need is a willingness to learn and explore.

**Personalized support and Follow up:** Whether you need a single support session or ongoing on-call care, please contact me to explore how I can best meet your unique needs. I offer free 20 minute introductory calls.

Email [nelia@birthwithcare.com](mailto:nelia@birthwithcare.com) or call 647-456-2229 to see how I can help your unique situation. **Sessions are available in person or by phone, with email support in between.**

## Additional resources

### SMALL STEPS TO FEELING BETTER

\*Questions I have for my health care provider:

\*One *small thing* I can do today that will help me feel a little better (eg 5 slow, deep breaths, a short walk, a nap – small things add up):



\*One *small thing* I can ask for help with (eg: one night feed, breastfeeding support, a 30 minute break each day that I can look forward to, reassurance that I'm doing a good job etc.)

## HALTON REGION:

**Support groups** Sometimes just being able to see other women in the same situation, can have tremendous value. Women often share tips and ideas on what has worked or simply give you the space to feel without having to edit yourself.

Moms supporting Moms in Milton:

905-825-6000 ext 2927

PMD Support Group: 905-849-6366

Oakville Parent Child Centre

**Medical/Psychological care:** Sometimes a woman needs to get a formal diagnosis or medication to help her over this challenging time. Hospital based postpartum programs have specialized Psychiatrists and Social Workers who provide clinical therapy and prescribe medications safest for breastfeeding.

Women's Health Concerns Clinic:

905- 522-1155 ext. 3031

St. Joseph's Healthcare, Hamilton

905-522-1155 ext. 3954 (self or physician referral)

**Public Health Nurses:** If you are concerned or unsure how you are doing, public health nurses can do an assessment over the phone. They will also provide you with community resources and set up a home visit with a public health nurse to provide additional information.

Halton Region Public Health, Family Health Line: 905-825-6000

## PEEL REGION:

All peel region supports *including Peel Public Health, Support Groups and hospital programs* are listed under [www.pmdinpeel.ca](http://www.pmdinpeel.ca)

## MOM GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES (HALTON/PEEL)

Each region has specific groups with ongoing meet ups, classes and workshops. Many offer free trials/drop in sessions. Visit

<http://www.birthwithcare.com/prenatal-and-postpartum-support/> (under subtitle – postpartum support) for a comprehensive list for Peel and Halton Region.

## NATURAL APPROACHES TO ANXIETY:

- **Yoga, Relaxation and Meditation (Prenatal and postpartum)**  
[www.birthwithcare.com](http://www.birthwithcare.com)
- **Links to free Relaxation and Meditation MP3's**  
<http://www.birthwithcare.com/prenatal-and-postpartum-support/> (see the Sleep heading)
- **Naturopathy:** Many women seek natural alternatives to coping with anxiety. Several natural remedies have shown promise including *supplementation with vitamins and Essential Fatty Acids*. To find a naturopath who specializes in perinatal health visit <http://www.apnd.org/>

## HELPFUL BOOKS, WEBSITES, RESOURCES:

- **Postpartum Depression and Anxiety booklets, checklists etc.**  
<http://beststart.org/resources/ppmd/>
- **Excellent Blog** on Postpartum depression and anxiety written by a fellow mom <http://www.postpartumprogress.com/>
- **Postpartum Doulas:** A postpartum doula “mothers the mother” and has specialized training in supporting new moms and babies. She helps with baby care, breastfeeding, light housekeeping etc. [www.doulacare.ca](http://www.doulacare.ca)

## INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES/SUPPORT:

**Postpartum Support International** <http://www.postpartum.net/> consists of the latest information and local support resources

**Post and Antenatal Depression Association** <http://www.panda.org.au/>

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