



# Pregnancy & Bipolar Disorder: Postpartum Period

The period of time after childbirth can be a high risk time for relapse of bipolar disorder. Although there is no way to guarantee you won't experience a postpartum recurrence of bipolar symptoms, there are things you can do to prepare and prevent:

-  **Manage anxiety about delivery.** The thought of delivery may bring up feelings of anxiety for some women, particularly those with a past history of a postpartum episode. These worries may interfere with sleep and increase the risk of a relapse. Speak to your health care provider and/or attend prenatal classes to help ease your nerves about childbirth.
-  **Minimize sleep disruption.** Sleep loss is inevitable around the time of delivery, so it may be difficult to maintain a regular sleep-wake cycle. While you are still in the hospital, have the baby stay in the nursery overnight and encourage sleep throughout the day so you can rest. When possible, involve your partner in night feedings and care for your newborn.
-  **Reduce stimulation.** This is especially important after delivery when visits by family and friends may cause excessive mental stimulation resulting in disrupted sleep.
-  **Reach out for social support.** Rely on partners, friends and family for emotional support and encouragement. This support system can also assist in caring for your newborn, giving you a break so you won't feel so overwhelmed. If you don't have a readily available support network, talk to your doctor about community resources that can help.
-  **Monitor your symptoms closely.** Keep a daily mood diary to track symptoms, mood changes, sleep disturbances, and medications, and share it with your doctor. This simple daily habit can be invaluable in predicting, identifying, and treating mood episodes before they become serious.
-  **Get help at the first sign of trouble.** If you experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, irritability, or mania, see your doctor right away. Early detection, monitoring, and treatment can help prevent a greater deterioration in mood.

This Tip Sheet is part of a series on  
Pregnancy & Bipolar Disorder.



For more on this topic, visit the  
Knowledge Center at [www.isbd.org](http://www.isbd.org).



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## Breastfeeding Facts

- Most medications for the treatment of bipolar disorder are excreted in breast milk.
- Talk to your doctor about the potential risks and benefits of taking medication while breastfeeding, including information about the signs of drug toxicity in your baby.
- Medication should be taken immediately following breastfeeding that day to reduce the risk of exposure to the infant.
- Since breastfeeding at night may cause frequent sleep disruptions, supplementing breast milk with formula feedings should be considered.

## Postpartum Psychosis: What You Need to Know

- Postpartum psychosis is the most serious psychiatric disturbance after childbirth.
- Symptoms can appear as early as 48 to 72 hours but usually occur during the first two weeks after childbirth.
- Early symptoms are often vague and may include **insomnia, agitation, and irritability**.
- As the illness evolves, a woman can develop **rapidly changing moods, confusion, bizarre behavior**, and she may hear voices or start to have strongly held beliefs that are not true (called **delusions**).
- Because postpartum psychosis may affect decision-making ability, women may think that there is nothing wrong with them and refuse treatment.
- Sleep loss, which is quite common around the time of delivery, can be a powerful trigger of postpartum psychosis.
- Postpartum psychosis is a psychiatric emergency and hospitalization is usually required.

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