

IT HAS A NAME: D-MER

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Raise your hand if you've ever heard of D-MER.

Raise your hand a little higher.

Hmm, there's not that many of you.

Chances are everyone reading this has either experienced it or knows someone who did, but most people don't know that it actually has a name.

It's a common breastfeeding-related condition that gets little attention and is not well known—and must be publicized. Because if you've experienced this, putting a name to the description will make you feel normal again.

I am grateful I've been able to nurse all my babies. When my eighth was born four years ago, I was relieved that once again nursing was no problem, except for one minor detail that had changed.

Every time I would start nursing, I'd suddenly be hit by the most overwhelming feeling of sadness. As if something terrible had just happened.

At first, I was confused.

What had I just seen? What had I just heard that had made me feel this way?

And then, the strangest part. After no more than 30 seconds at most, the feeling was gone and I felt great again. Gone without a trace. To the extent that at first I thought I was imagining it.

But then I noticed the pattern. All was well, I was going about my day in a good mood. I'd sit down to nurse and suddenly be hit by this emotional wave. I'd count to 20 or 30 and it would be gone, leaving no trace. It was fascinating and bizarre all at the same time. I started asking around, my sisters and my network of friends. No one could understand what I was describing.

I started doubting myself. Was it true? Maybe I was making it up! But then I'd nurse again and experience it all over again.

My baby got older and slowly these incidents stopped and I forgot about it. Until my ninth was born, two and a half years ago. I recognized it as soon

as it happened. Everything was fine, I was feeling good and my baby nursed well. But I'd sit down to nurse and bam, there came that emotional overload. I'd focus on my counting, knowing it would dissipate before I got to 30, and it was gone.

But what was it?!? I googled any terms I could think of. Sadness while nursing. Overwhelming feeling while breastfeeding. No results.

I asked my doctor about it at my six-week follow-up. This time I knew I wasn't hallucinating. I knew I felt it. My OB stared at me blankly. She said some random platitudes like, "Make sure you're drinking water, and getting enough help in the house." But I *knew* that wasn't it. It was hard to explain but I knew it was real!

I started polling my sisters and friends again and still, nothing doing. No one understood what I was referring to. Because really, it sounded crazy. An overwhelming emotional overload for 20 to 30 seconds?! Something that had no connection to the activity I was



Goldie Grossbaum with her baby, Shmaya.

doing right before nor to where I was? It sounded crazy.

I was able to continue nursing with no problem, and, just as with the previous baby, the episodes faded and I forgot about it again.

And then, a few months later, I was reading an article in a magazine and I nearly yelled out loud.

This was it!! They were describing me!! *This this this!* It was real! I wasn't making it up! It even had a name!

The elation, the sheer joy and excitement at being validated!

True, this condition hadn't interrupted my life, thank G-d. But I knew something was going on to trigger it and I so badly wanted to know what it was. And here was my answer, in print.

D-MER. It had a name. It was real. Dysphoric Milk Ejection Reflex.

It was as strange and bizarre as I described it, but there was a reason for it. I went to D-MER.org and read everything there, top to bottom and bottom to top. There wasn't a whole lot of information, but the name and description were enough.

It was a real condition.

As explained on the D-MER.org website, "*D-MER has been linked to an inappropriate drop in dopamine that occurs whenever milk is released. In a mother with D-MER, at the time of letdown, dopamine falls inappropriately, causing negative feelings.*"

Milk release itself isn't caused by dopamine dropping; it's caused by oxytocin rising. In D-MER, the MER (milk ejection

reflex) is a result of rising oxytocin (needed to move the milk out of the breast) but the D (dysphoria) is a result of inappropriately falling dopamine. Dopamine gets involved because it inhibits prolactin (which is what makes the milk) so dopamine levels need to drop for prolactin levels to rise in order to make more milk. Normally, dopamine drops properly and breastfeeding mothers never knew it even happened; in D-MER mothers however, it doesn't drop properly and causes an instant and brief wave of a negative emotional reaction that lasts until the dopamine levels restabilize after prolactin has begun its rise."

There's a broad range from extremely mild (in my case, lasting about 20 seconds) to the extreme of debilitating anxiety that lasts long after the nursing is over, causing women to stop nursing because it is too difficult.

And I shared the info with every person I could think of. I don't know why it does not get much publicity and why it's hardly known. Any woman can experience it; it has nothing to do with any other part of your life.

It has nothing to do with one's emotional or psychological well-being. Read that again. It has nothing to do with one's emotional or psychological well-being. It is solely related to the milk release while breastfeeding. It is fascinating.

Fast forward to the birth of my tenth in May, just a few months ago. I start nursing and bam, there it goes. But I know what it is, it has a name! I am not crazy. This is real. I count through it and then it's gone.

I go back to D-MER.org and see that there is even more information available on it than the last time I checked.

It has a name. I know the name. And I want to make sure that every single woman out there knows the name D-MER. D-MER.

It's real and it's a broad spectrum. For some it affects their decision to nurse or not. And for some, like me, it's the knowledge alone that it has a name and is real that helps me get through it and be able to nurse happily and successfully.

Even if you've never experienced this, you can help. Listen carefully the next time one of your newly postpartum friends starts talking about how she feels. You may be the one to give her the name of what she is experiencing, together with the validation that what she's experiencing is real, which would be the very best baby gift, ever. ❄️

Goldie Grossbaum and her husband, Rabbi Yossi, direct Chabad of Folsom and El Dorado Hills in California with the help of their children. To read more of Goldie's musings, visit littleyellownotepad.com.