

Musia with Esther

THE OBEDIENT CAMPER

A STORY OF PPD RECOVERY

Musia Baumgarten

IT It was just like summer camp. At breakfast, lunch, and dinner, I dutifully ate what was served to me. Various activities were available whenever I desired, and I followed the instructions I was given for each one. Playing board games, watching a video, sitting outside in the sunlight, going for walks, and even trips to the grocery. I followed every directive, just as every good camper should. Except it wasn't summer camp. And I wasn't 14 years old.

I was 21, a married woman, and had recently given birth.

Following a typical pregnancy and normal labor and delivery, my husband and I became parents to a healthy baby boy. I was overjoyed and overwhelmed at the awesomeness of bringing another soul into the world—my baby! Thankfully, my two days in the wonderful Staten Island University Hospital passed by quickly, and before long, on a cold Friday in December, I was on my way to recover at my parents' home in Crown Heights.

(On that very same day, about an hour's distance from me, over the Verrazano Bridge in New Jersey, my sister gave birth to her fourth child, a beautiful, healthy girl! Nothing could have bonded us more than raising newborns at the same time.)

My first few days and nights as a new mother passed uneventfully. Though I'm not sure exactly when, at some point things changed. It began with my loss

of appetite. As an admitted foodie that's *very* strange for me. My parents and my husband, Aizik, prepared meals for me and I simply ate what I was served. Not because of a desire to, but simply because I was instructed to. I wondered about the loss of appetite but did not reach any conclusions.

Next I noticed a change in my emotions. It began with the feeling of being totally overwhelmed. Every time my precious little boy fell asleep, I thought of everything that had to be done and wondered, "What should I do now?" A list composed itself in my brain, each item fighting for priority placement. Eat,

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

Women can experience many symptoms of postpartum depression due to normal hormonal changes, the stress of giving birth, or just caring for a new baby. These postpartum blues characterized by emotional ups and downs in the first weeks after birth are normal. However, if symptoms are severe or last longer than two weeks, then further evaluation is needed. Many women suffer with postpartum depression either because they are ashamed or do not realize they need help. Getting help sooner can relieve symptoms and make it easier to cope.

How long after giving birth is a woman at risk for PPD? Medical opinions vary, but a woman is typically considered postpartum for up to 12 months following childbirth. Postpartum depression symptoms can begin anytime during this first year after birth.

How common is PPD? It is estimated that 13% to 19% of women experience postpartum depression. However, many women have a hard time recognizing their condition or feel ashamed to admit how they are feeling, which results in an underreporting of symptoms. What are the risk factors for PPD? Anybody can come down with PPD, and there are not necessarily any external causes. However, a personal history of depression, anxiety, or postpartum depression, a disappointing birth experience, adjusting to a new body, trouble with nursing, marital stress, financial stress, lack of support in caring for children, having a thyroid imbalance, having any form of diabetes (type 1, type 2 or gestational), or having a major recent life event such as loss of a loved one, house move, or career change, can increase the chance of experiencing PPD. What are the symptoms of PPD? A woman may feel any of the following for a period lasting longer than two weeks:

- Changes in appetite or weight
- Anxious, irritable, and angry
- Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling tired or lack of energy
- Crying spells
- Overwhelmed or feelings of guilt
- Unable to care for baby
- Trouble bonding with baby
- Feeling like a failure as a mother

Though not very common, some women can experience postpartum psychosis, which can lead to thoughts of self-harm or thoughts of hurting others. This is a medical emergency and a call to a medical provider, or, if not available, an ambulance is advised.

Treatment: Treatment for PPD can include medication, therapy, and referral to community resources that offer additional support. It is important to remember that evaluation by a medical provider is needed to rule out other medical conditions that can have similar symptoms to PPD. Alternative therapies and self-care are helpful adjuncts to medical care.Support for Mothers: Postpartum Support International has a toll free hotline that offers support and guidance for women in need of postpartum depression support and services. They can be reached at 1.800.944.4773 or www.postpartum.net

Guidance for family member or friends:

Encourage rest, exercise, and good nutrition

Ask what support is needed and provide it if possible

Advise seeing a medical professional

Support the use of medications if needed

Remember that postpartum depression is not anyone's fault, sometimes it just happens

Learn about postpartum depression and other perinatal mood and anxiety disorders

Stay positive, this is temporary, she will recover!

Compiled by Chaya Sarah Naiditch BSN, RN, using information from Postpartum.net, Uptodate.com, and the book Postpartum Mood and Anxiety Disorders: A Clinician's Guide by Beck and Driscoll.



Esther

sleep, shower, care for my body that was still recovering from the birth. Or should I first shower, then eat? I was completely distraught. Where to start and where to end? Making a decision on my own was more than I was capable of. Instead, Aizik and my parents planned my schedule for me. I vaguely remember following instructions in between my tears of frustration. Not a very good camper…

I recall being in a particularly emotional state and telling Aizik that I thought it was more than just ordinary post-baby hormones. I asked aloud, "Could this be postpartum depression?" But really, what did any of us know? So I made my comment, my husband listened, and my tears continued.

By then it was time for my baby's first visit to the pediatrician. This was quite a milestone for me; I was so proud to be bringing my son to our family physician, Dr. Elie Rosen, who had cared for me and my siblings when we were babies. My mother accompanied me for the visit. He took one look at me and said to my mother, "Tzirl, forget the baby for a second. Musia looks terrible."

I burst into tears. Dr. Rosen had been my doctor since infancy and knew me well. He was 100% right, I did look terrible, because I felt terrible.

With his endless patience, Dr. Rosen asked me a few questions which I answered between sniffles. The pain and bewilderment were plain to see, but I could not pinpoint the source. At the end of our conversation, I was given strict instructions to come back to see him if I didn't start feeling better soon.

Weeks passed and I wasn't feeling any better. While my little boy slept peacefully in my lap, tears would shake my body—for no apparent reason. I clearly recall sitting in a rocking chair in my parents' living room, my son fast asleep in my arms, an angelic look about him, but I just could not stop crying.

Day after day my husband would find me this way and call my mother, "Shviger, she's crying again." (Because what's he supposed to do when his wife of all of nine months won't stop crying? Our poor innocent husbands are just not prepared for this!) So my mother would





Top: Zelig
Bottom: Sholom

sit beside me, stroke my back, and hand me tissues as my tears continued to flow.

It was then that I researched postpartum depression and began to understand what was taking place in my body.

It was all very overwhelming. Everything was difficult: getting out of bed, dressing myself, eating, and feeding the baby, especially because breastfeeding was so challenging. With Dr. Rosen's guidance and the support of my husband, I switched to bottle feeding, which I found less stressful to deal with.

Three weeks passed. I pulled tissue after tissue from the box next to my rocking chair. At the same time, unbeknownst to me, my mother plotted my recovery.

"The baby is in the stroller ready to go out. Here's your coat. Go for a walk with Aizik and get me a few things from the store," she would say sweetly. So off we went.

"Dr. Rosen said you need sun. Put on my fur and come sit on the back porch where it's sunny." It was the beginning of winter and starting to get cold, but that didn't matter. Robotically, I followed my mother's every cue and instruction.

My mother's persistence in getting me up and about played a key role in my recovery. A wise nurturer, she saw what I was dealing with and her support, counsel, and guidance took me a long way.

But my mother's persistence wasn't enough. One day my father informed me that I had another appointment scheduled with Dr. Rosen. Clearly, I wasn't getting any better and I needed help. During this visit, Dr. Rosen gave me the official diagnosis of mild PPD. I was advised to either take medication or wait it out, for recovery on my own would be possible. His advice was to take the antidepressants, and because I did not want to feel this heavy, bewildering sadness any longer, I agreed.

I spent another few weeks at my parents' and then the time arrived for my little family to go back to our own apartment. I don't recall exactly who made dinner for me each night, or how many times my mother came to check on me every day, but I was very grateful for everyone's kindness. I do recall feeling absolutely terrified at the thought of being home alone with my baby. Would I do right by him? Would I know how to handle any challenge that arose? What if I failed? G-d bless my husband who took our son to shul with him many, many mornings.

People ask me how long it took me to recover fully, and the truth is that I don't really know. It took a while for the terror of being home alone with the baby to go away, but it eventually did go away. Whenever I was home with the baby for a long period of time, or if I went out with him by myself, I felt like I had completed a cross country triathlon!

The thing with PPD is that you don't know when it's going to hit you again. So I would ride the wave of happiness and accomplishment for as long as I could. Every so often, though, the wave crashed and I was left feeling completely helpless, overwhelmed, and utterly incapable of caring for my son.

I was also afraid of the future and I wondered if the PPD would return after future pregnancies. It didn't take long for me to, fortunately, become pregnant again and find out.

I continued to suffer from PPD with my second and third babies. My husband, my parents, and my in-laws were better prepared and knew what to do.

As in any challenging situation a strong support system is necessary. I am fortunate to have that, including the right therapist. My desire to share my story is rooted in the knowledge that in reading this, people who are similarly suffering can feel supported, know they are not alone, and will seek the right help.

May we all be *zocheh* to be healthy in mind and in body, and to raise a new generation that is aware of and can openly discuss their challenges in order

to reach resolutions in a timely and well-supported manner.

Musia Baumgarten and her husband Aizik are the program directors of Chabad of East Hampton, NY. Musia shares this story hoping to eliminate the stigma attached to PPD.

Do you have a story to tell with a valuable lesson or a personal reflection that may resonate with our readers? If you have not yet been published, and don't know if you ever will be, but know deep down that you have something valuable to share, Delving Deeper is for you! The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught, "If you know Aleph, teach Aleph." Each of us has something of value to share with others. And we can all benefit from hearing about what others have been through, and what they have learned from their life experiences, many of which are different from anything we have ever imagined! It is the hope of the column's curator, ***Yonit Tanenbaum*** *of YQ Media, that each article printed in this series will encourage readers to further know, understand, respect, and love one another. Email delvingdeeper.nshei@gmail.com with your story today.*

FOR ALL YOUR SPEECH NEEDS,
VISIT SHULA BRYSKI'S

www.rentaspeech.com



WE OFFER PRE-WRITTEN AND CUSTOM SPEECHES FOR ALL OCCASIONS!

We also edit large projects and smaller writings including books, blogs, websites, presentations, newsletters, letters, articles, essays, speeches, ads and e-mails. We will make sure your writing is free of grammar errors and typos. We are also happy to help you with the content and progression.



Bais Chaya Mushka Seminary wishes Mazel Tov to our graduates and staff on their recent Simchas.

Marriage

Goldie Junik to Dovi Lepkivker
Chanie Avraham to Shimon Alon
Mushky Goldshmid to Mendel Naparstek
Lysa Cohen to Shneor Zalman Meir Bueno

Baby

Naftoli & Rochel Charytan (Yarmush) – boy
Shmuel & Shainy Edelman (Blau) – girl
Dovid & Zahava Lubecki (Taieb) – girl
Mendel & Shaina Gourarie (Lison) – girl
Mendy & Chaya Mushka Drookman (Morozow) – girl
Mendy & Esther Markowitz (Edelman) – girl
Schneur & Chaya Yecheilov (Ceitlin) – girl
Shalom & Rivka Gniwisch (Soussan) – girl
Chaim & Chaya Mushka Shcherbina (Grinker) – girl
Yecheskel & Nechamie Raeburn (Rothman) – boy
Avrohom Chaim & Esty Stern (Altein) – girl
Schneur Zalman & Faige Rabin (Bronstein) – girl
Yaakov & Mushkie Perlman (Kohn) – bo
Shaya & Fruma Spielman (Morrison) – girl
Getzy & Chana Rubashkin (Yusevitz) - girl

Please update your Mazel Tovs on http://theseminary.ca/mazel-tov/
BCMS • 5115 Vezina Ave, Montreal, Quebec H3W 1C2
Tel: (514) 733-2221 • Fax: (514) 733-5051