



POSTPARTUM HARM THOUGHTS

Perinatal Anxiety Research Lab
parlab.med.ubc.ca

WE HAVE LOTS OF THOUGHTS ALL THE TIME

SOME THINGS WE CHOOSE TO THINK ABOUT

- Images
- Words
- Urges

SOME THOUGHTS JUST "POP" INTO OUR HEADS

● OUR THOUGHTS CAN BE... ●

WE HAVE MANY KINDS OF THOUGHTS

T H O U G H T S

Some are **NICE...**

Some are **WEIRD...**

Some are **not so NICE...**

WHAT ABOUT THE ONES I DON'T LIKE?

Some of our thoughts are **unpleasant** and we don't want them!

They can be about all sorts of things we find **unpleasant** or **upsetting**.

A thought that comes into your mind when you don't want it to is an **INTRUSIVE THOUGHT**.

Any thought can feel **intrusive** if it happens when we don't want it to!

WHY DO I THINK THE THINGS I THINK?

We're more likely to think about the things we're **worried** about...

Intrusive thoughts are more **common** when we're **stressed out!**

DO I NOTICE ALL MY INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS?

NOPE!

The ones I ignore

- The thought is kind of **BORING**
- It doesn't apply to **ME**
- It's nice but **NOT A BIG DEAL**
- It's a part of the **ENVIRONMENT**

The ones I pay attention to

- It's really **UPSETTING**
- It's about **ME**
- It makes me think **I'M A BAD PERSON**
- This could **REALLY HAPPEN!**

WHY ARE SOME INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS OPPOSITE OF WHAT I WANT?

We are more likely to pay attention to intrusive thoughts about things we don't want to happen!

What if my baby gets sick

Saying your ex's name with your wedding vows

Swearing at your boss

WHO EXPERIENCES WHICH THOUGHTS

I might hurt my baby

I might not notice something important

I might give the wrong medications

WHAT ABOUT NEW MOMS

New moms think about their baby **ALL THE TIME!**

New moms want their babies to be really safe

New moms think about danger **A LOT!**

AND...
New moms experience **UNWANTED, INTRUSIVE** thoughts about their baby

MOST NEW MOMS HAVE THOUGHTS ABOUT HARM COMING TO THEIR BABY

ACCIDENTAL HARM

- What if I drop my baby?
- What if I get stuck in the car with my baby?
- What if my baby suffocates in her sleep?
- I could picture the ball getting in my baby's hand!

INTENTIONAL HARM

- I could throw my baby off the balcony!
- What if I throw a shoe at my baby?
- I could get stuck with a baby in my car!

HOW COMMON ARE NEW MOTHERS' THOUGHTS OF INFANT-RELATED HARM?

100% of new mothers report **unwanted, intrusive** thoughts of harming their baby **BY ACCIDENT**

50% of new mothers report **unwanted, intrusive** thoughts of harming their baby **ON PURPOSE**

WHY DO PARENTS HAVE THESE KINDS OF THOUGHTS?

We don't exactly know why, but we think it may be related to our evolution.

People have likely evolved to be hyper-alert to sources of danger when they are new parents.

Harm thoughts help us stay alert!

DO DADS HAVE THESE THOUGHTS TOO?

Compared to moms, dads...

Experience these thoughts less often

Find them less upsetting

Can find them more difficult to talk about

PARENTS DON'T ACT ON THEIR UNWANTED, INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS, IMAGES OR IMPULSES..

There is no evidence that moms act on their **UNWANTED, INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS, IMAGES or IMPULSES** - even violent ones!

The mom on the left is no more likely to harm their infant than the mom on the right!

This mom has thoughts about hurting their baby on **PURPOSE**

This mom has thoughts about hurting their baby **BY ACCIDENT**

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT WORRIED I'LL HURT MY BABY?

I'm having **unwanted, intrusive** thoughts about hurting my baby

I'm scared I might act on my **unwanted, intrusive** thoughts about my baby

I have **OCD** and my obsessions are about harming my baby

Nope!

IS IT NORMAL TO BE UPSET ABOUT THESE THOUGHTS?

Thoughts of harming your infant can be very upsetting and distressing

YES!

Unwanted, intrusive thoughts of hurting your baby on purpose tend to be the most upsetting

SO, WHY DO SOME MOMS HURT THEIR BABIES?

Even though it's **REALLY RARE**, some mothers do hurt their babies.

When a new mom hurts their baby, it's usually because they are struggling with serious mental health difficulties or are very alone and unsupported.

If you are experiencing mental health difficulties, or are struggling in other ways (even if you think you are not at risk of harming your baby) it can be really helpful to talk to someone about what you're going through.

IF YOU INTERPRET THE FACT THAT YOU ARE HAVING THESE THOUGHTS, OR THE CONTENT OF YOUR THOUGHTS TO MEAN...

I'M CRAZY

I'M A DANGER TO MY BABY

I'M A BAD PERSON

...your unwanted intrusive thoughts may be very distressing and keep popping up.

This can be part of a problem disorder called **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**.

WHAT IS OCD?

OCD IS AN ANXIETY-RELATED DISORDER WITH 2 MAIN FEATURES

OBSESSIONS
Recurrent, unwanted intrusive thoughts that are often upsetting

COMPULSIONS
Things you do over and over again to help you feel better about your obsessions

COMPULSIONS

- Checking:** Checking if my baby is breathing
- Reassurance seeking:** Asking my partner if they think our baby is healthy
- Washing:** Washing my baby's things over and over to make sure they're clean

OBSESSIONS

- Image:** Stepping on my baby
- Thought:** What if I shove my baby
- Impulse:** To scream at my baby

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PERINATAL OCD?

OCD appears most common during the postpartum period

OCD is more common during pregnancy and the postpartum period

Obsessions in perinatal OCD often involve the infant

Obsessions of harm towards the infant are common

17% of pregnant and postpartum women will experience perinatal OCD

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE OCD?

- OBSESSIONS and COMPULSIONS** take over an hour a day
- Your OCD symptoms are really upsetting to you
- Your OCD is making it really difficult for you to manage your life

● The obsessions and compulsions are making it difficult to manage ●

Your relationship

Caring for your baby

Your work

Your day to day tasks

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT MY OCD?

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)** is the most effective form of therapy for OCD
- There is now evidence that **CBT is effective for perinatal OCD**
- Often it is a **psychologist** who provides CBT
- CBT will focus on how you are **interpreting** your obsessions and what you are **doing** about them

WILL I GET BETTER, OR WILL I ALWAYS HAVE THESE THOUGHTS?

For most new parents, these thoughts go away over time.

Becoming a parent, especially for the first time, can be a **stressful experience** and it is normal for it to take some time to adapt.

Everyone with a new baby adapts to their new care giving role at different times but once you do, you will feel more settled being a parent and looking after your baby.

WHY DIDN'T ANYONE TELL ME?

Someone should have told you - really!

The problem is most people don't know...

Everyone should know about this...

RESOURCES

Maternal OCD
maternalocd.org
@maternalocd
info@maternalocd.org

OCD Action
https://ocdaction.org.uk
@ocdaction
info@ocdaction.org.uk
Helpline: 0300 636 5478

Anxiety Canada
anxietycanada.com
@Anxiety_Canada
info@anxietycanada.com

Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia
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