

Postpartum Illness: A Review

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Received: 05/09/2025/ Revised: 20/11/2025 / Accepted: 05-12-2025

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Conflict of interest: Nil

Abstract

Postpartum illness encompasses all the physical, emotional, and psychological conditions encountered by women following childbirth. Conditions include postpartum depression, anxiety disorders, postpartum psychosis, and physical complications, such as infections, excessive bleeding, and thyroid dysfunction. Commonly linked causes of postpartum illnesses include hormonal changes, stress, and sleep deprivation; however, genetics, environmental factors, and social factors are equally important. Left untreated, these conditions can have a huge impact on maternal well-being, infant care, and family dynamics. Early diagnosis and intervention, including medical treatment, counseling, and social support, are essential to promote recovery and prevent long-term consequences. This article reviews the clinical manifestations, risk factors, diagnostic approaches, and therapeutic strategies for addressing postpartum illness, emphasizing the importance of integrated care to support maternal and family health.

Keywords: Mental health, physical health, interventions, long term impacts

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INTRODUCTION

The postpartum period, also known as the postnatal period, begins immediately after childbirth and typically lasts for about six weeks, although its physical and psychological effects may continue beyond this timeframe. During this period, a woman's body undergoes significant hormonal, physiological, and emotional changes as it returns to the non-pregnant state while adapting to the demands of caring for a newborn. These changes can make women vulnerable to a variety of health challenges, making the postpartum phase a critical time for monitoring and support.

Classification of Postpartum Illnesses

Postpartum illnesses are broadly classified into physical conditions and emotional or mental health disorders. Physical conditions include postpartum hemorrhage, infections, uterine complications, mastitis, pelvic floor disorders, thyroid dysfunction, and complications related to cesarean section or episiotomy. Emotional and mental health disorders encompass postpartum blues, postpartum depression, postpartum anxiety, postpartum obsessive-compulsive disorder, postpartum post-traumatic stress disorder, and postpartum psychosis.

Common Types of Postpartum Illnesses

Among the most common postpartum illnesses, postpartum blues affect a majority of new mothers and are characterized by mood swings, irritability,

and emotional sensitivity that usually resolve within a few weeks. Postpartum depression is more serious and persistent, leading to deep sadness, fatigue, lack of interest in daily activities, and difficulty bonding with the baby. Postpartum anxiety involves excessive and uncontrollable worry, often focused on the baby's health and safety. Less common but severe conditions include postpartum OCD, PTSD following traumatic childbirth, and postpartum psychosis, which requires immediate medical intervention.

Causes and Risk Factors

The development of postpartum illnesses is multifactorial and influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors. Sudden hormonal changes after delivery, physical exhaustion, sleep deprivation, emotional stress, breastfeeding difficulties, and previous mental health disorders contribute significantly. Additional risk factors include lack of social or family support, marital or financial stress, unplanned pregnancy, and complications during pregnancy or childbirth.

Importance of Early Recognition and Treatment

Early recognition and timely management of postpartum illnesses are essential to protect the health of the mother and the well-being of the infant. Prompt treatment helps prevent the progression of symptoms, improves maternal functioning, enhances mother-infant bonding, and reduces the risk of long-

term psychological and physical complications. A combination of medical care, psychological counseling, and strong social support plays a vital role in recovery and family stability.

Symptoms of Postpartum Illnesses

Symptoms of postpartum illnesses may be physical, emotional, or psychological in nature. Common emotional symptoms include persistent sadness, anxiety, excessive crying, mood swings, irritability, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, and difficulty bonding with the baby. Psychological symptoms may involve intrusive thoughts, panic attacks, confusion, or hallucinations in severe cases. Physical symptoms include prolonged bleeding, fever, abdominal pain, breast pain or redness, urinary incontinence, extreme fatigue, and sleep disturbances beyond normal postpartum exhaustion.

Medicine and Therapy

Management of postpartum illnesses depends on the type and severity of the condition. Mild conditions such as postpartum blues often resolve with rest, reassurance, and family support. Moderate to severe conditions like postpartum depression and anxiety may require psychotherapy, antidepressants, or newer pharmacological agents such as zuranolone or brexanolone under medical supervision. Physical conditions are treated with appropriate medical or surgical interventions, while pelvic floor dysfunction benefits from pelvic floor physical therapy. Supportive therapies, including counseling, support groups, and mother-baby care units, play an important role in holistic postpartum care and recovery.

CONCLUSION

Postpartum illness is a general term that describes a variety of physical and psychological health problems that may occur after childbirth. The conditions can

range from common, short-term problems to more serious disorders that require medical attention. The postpartum period is generally considered to be the first six weeks after delivery, a time of great physical and emotional adjustment for new mothers. Most women recover quickly, but some experience complications that affect their well-being.

Physically, postpartum women may present with symptoms such as fatigue, pelvic discomfort, and hormonal changes as the body returns to its pre-pregnancy state. Other common conditions include postpartum hemorrhage, infections, and breast issues, such as mastitis. Early detection and management of these conditions are important to prevent long-term complications and ensure optimal recovery. Psychologically, PPD is one of the most common and serious conditions that affect mothers. The symptoms of PPD include persistent sadness, feelings of hopelessness, and failure to bond with the baby. Anxiety, mood swings, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to childbirth are also prevalent among new mothers. These conditions often go undiagnosed or untreated, which can significantly affect the mother's quality of life and her ability to care for her newborn.

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