

SCARY THOUGHTS

“IS WHAT I AM THINKING NORMAL?” OR “AM I GOING CRAZY?”

Amy Chouinard, LCMHC

Perinatal & Women's
Mental Health Counseling PLLC

603.233.4963

www.postpartumnh.com

The Truth about Scary Thoughts

- Scary thoughts are negative, repetitive, unwanted, and/or intrusive thoughts or images that can bombard you at any time. They can come out of nowhere.
- Scary thoughts are common with all new parents.
- Scary thoughts can come in the form of IDEAS (What if I burn the baby in the bathtub?), IMAGES (I keep picturing the baby falling off the changing table), or IMPULSES (Every time I go into the kitchen, I feel like I'm going to pick up that knife and stab him).
- Scary thoughts can be indirect or passive (something might happen to the baby), or they can imply intention (thoughts or images of throwing the baby against the wall).
- Scary thoughts are NOT an indication of psychosis. They make you feel like you are going crazy, but you are not.
- Scary thoughts typically focus on your baby, but they can also center on you, your partner, and/or your other children.
- Scary thoughts can make you believe you are a bad mother. They can make

*“Scary thinking feels so real.
It is often hard to tell if the
thoughts are legitimate worries
or anxiety driven.”*

Helpful Websites:

www.postpartumstress.com
www.postpartumprogress.com
www.womensmentalhealth.org
www.postpartumdadsproject.org
www.postpartum.net
www.postpartumeducationandsupport.com

Local resources:

Elliot Postpartum Emotional Support Group
Nini Bambini - Bedford NH
Find your local Mom's Support Group

Feeling Good Again Self-help strategies

Distraction: Interrupts the loop of negative thinking, temporarily. When fear is taking hold, do something that feels manageable. Your body will settle and you will feel more in control. Deliberately absorb yourself in an activity.

Breath, Relax, and be Mindful: When you are anxious often, your body remains in a fixed state of tension. Learning to belly breath will help you gain control over a physical symptom of anxiety. Next, add progressive muscle relaxation. Mindfulness is paying attention on purpose, to the present moment, nonjudgmentally. This can improve mood and anxiety symptoms.

S.E.L.F. Care: *Sleep*- lack of it will make anxiety and depression worse. *Exercise*- helps diffuse adrenaline produced by anxiety and releases endorphins. *Laugh*- lowers adrenaline and cortisol, hormones released in times of stress. *Food*- Feed your body healthy foods.

Journal, Self-help reading & Online support communities

WHAT ARE SCARY THOUGHTS?

Negative, repetitive, unwanted, and/or intrusive thoughts or images that are upsetting. They can come at any time, unexpectedly. They do not respond to efforts to dismiss them. They feel inconsistent to who you believe yourself to be and cause anxiety or distress.

EXCESSIVE WORRY

When worry becomes chronic. Often becoming a physical symptom of constant heaviness, tightness in the chest, and difficulty breathing. It becomes pervasive. Everyday thoughts can overlap with disproportionate worry and may lay the groundwork for scary and unwanted thoughts to emerge.

OBSESSIVE THOUGHTS

Thoughts, preoccupations, images, or impulses that are intrusive, persistent, recurrent, and difficult to control.

INTRUSIVE MEMORIES

Childbirth can be both physically and emotionally traumatic. You may experience intrusive and unwanted memories of the stressful birth, thinking over and over about the most distressing aspects.

RUMINATION

Repetitive, obsessive, or racing thoughts that preoccupy the mind. Those who ruminate tend to be hard on themselves and self-deprecating and tend to interpret their life situation in a negative light and predict negative outcomes.

Examples of Scary Thoughts

Accidental Harm

- ❖ What if I drop the baby down the stairs?
- ❖ What if I leave the baby at the store?
- ❖ What if I drop the knife and cut the baby?

Baby's Well-being

- ❖ What if she stops breathing in the middle of the night?
- ❖ If I take the baby out or let others touch her, she might get sick.

Intentional Harm

- ❖ What if I get so mad I shake the baby?
- ❖ What if I throw the baby over the railing or down the stairs?
- ❖ What would happen if I put the baby in the microwave or the freezer?
- ❖ What if I take this pillow and smother the baby?
- ❖ What if I press so hard on his soft spot that it crushes his skull?

Sexual in Nature

- ❖ Every time I bathe the baby, I find myself staring at her naked body and wonder why I can't stop.
- ❖ When I breastfeed, sometimes I feel aroused. Does this mean I could abuse my baby?

Images

- ❖ Envisioning your baby dead at the in the tub
- ❖ Picturing your baby dead in the crib
- ❖ Seeing yourself smothering your baby

About yourself

- ❖ My children would be better off with another mother.
- ❖ I'm not sure if I love my baby.
- ❖ I never should have had this baby.

About others

- ❖ I don't trust anyone to be with my baby.
- ❖ What if someone hurts my baby?
- ❖ Everyone thinks I'm a bad mother.

About the future

- ❖ What if things never get better?
- ❖ What if the baby does not gain weight?
- ❖ What if I can't handle going to work?

How do I make these scary thoughts stop?

- * Know that you are a good mother and good mothers DO think bad thoughts when they are struggling with symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- * Remember tthat these thoughts are NOT about who you are, they are symptoms. The more you think about them, the more you empower them.
- * Try to distract yourself from the thoughts.
- * Tell yourself that it's okay you're having these thoughts, nothing bad is happening and you won't always feel this way.
- * Keep your brain busy with tasks such as puzzles or games which make you concentrate.
- * Get up and out, take a walk, listen to upbeat music, dance, do something else.
- * Tell someone you trust that you are having these thoughts and that you know these thoughts are symptoms of depression. Let them reassure you that you will be okay when you get the treatment you need. Let them remind you that you are loved and safe.
- * These thoughts are symptoms and they are treatable and respond well to medication and supportive therapy.
- * Talk to your Doctor, talk to your partner, get the help you need.

If your thoughts are out of control and you cannot manage the intrusion, contact your doctor immediately.

If you at any time feel you or the baby are not safe, call 911 or have someone bring you to the emergency room.

If you have been told that your thoughts are worrisome to others but they seem real to you, or you feel that your thoughts make sense and everyone around you must be the crazy ones, let someone close to you know how you are feeling and tell them it's an emergency.

What if I talk about what I am thinking and get the help I need?

What if I believe this can and will get better?

What if, by talking about this, I get relief, and I feel less guilty?

What if I discover that what I am feeling and thinking is not so bizarre and that a lot of women feel this way?

What if people I trust reassure me and I am comforted by my decision to talk about this?

What if?