

INTERPRETER OF MALADIES

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Is post-partum depression real?

Post-partum depression is no longer recognised as a condition by its own right in DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders, fifth edition) but can still be recorded as a specifier if the onset of depression is within 4 weeks of childbirth. However, some clinicians are already finding this time limit to be too narrow and are in favour of further widening it to 6-12 months of childbirth.

These changes in classification do not make post-partum depression unreal at all.



This mental condition, although rare, does exist. Current protocol is to record it as a depressive episode, which is commonly part of Unipolar and sometimes part of Bipolar illness. This attempt by DSM to regroup previously called post-partum depression under another umbrella term is probably an acknowledgement of its close similarity to mood disorder and lack of enough reasons to give it a separate entity. Eventually, this is supposed to guide clinicians to investigate and acknowledge the complexity and intersectionality of this mental health condition.

Like any other evolving field of health science, mental health diagnosis also constantly changes based on new research findings to ensure evidence-based service and quality of comprehensive care. Scope and practice of psychiatry have been rapidly expanding with the use of newer assessment tools developed with the help of latest knowledge, experience, and statistical data gathered in the clinical field.

Baby blue or maternity blue (feeling moody, vulnerable, stressed for a few days after childbirth) is far more common than post-partum depression across the world. Women who experience more severe symptoms (e.g. sadness, fatigue, restlessness, agitation, difficulty in making decisions etc.) which impact their daily functioning level, are at higher risk of developing post-partum depression and are also likely to have depressive illness



outside the context of childbirth. There are psychological, social, and

biological causes of depression. New mothers with genetic predisposition to depression become more susceptible to it because of childbirth-related hormonal (e.g., oestrogen, progesterone, thyroid hormones etc.) changes. Chronic stress (which eventually affects stress circuit of brain and body) of family dysfunction, additional caregiving role, lack of respite care and financial hardship etc. can make things even worse. Depressive episodes in post-partum period is found to be independent of number of childbirth or previous history of it.

It would be worth exploring any history of domestic violence, marital discord, if the baby was wanted or not, history of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, or if the baby is of special need etc. to chalk out a comprehensive treatment plan.

Psychotherapy is often recommended to address underlying psycho-social issues to restore mental health. Addressing any underlying attachment trauma or self-esteem issues, focusing on stress management skills, exploring self-care options etc. might be useful. Organising a "circle of care" composed of family members, neighbours, friends, and professionals might be necessary to ensure proper child-care. It is also important to remember that physical health and nutrition of mother often gets neglected in a stressful family environment. Treatment plan might include prescribing antidepressants after a proper assessment.

Photo courtesy: Mere

Why every woman should give Menstrual Cups a chance

All of us women dread that time of the month, and we all know why. But since I've come across menstrual cups, my dread has deadened quite a lot. They've made my periods, and my life, a lot better. And today, I'll share with you why, so that you too are converted.

Forgetting you are on your period

Compared to pads, with the constant concern of impending doom, cups turned out to be a miracle. Once I grasped how to wear it right and got comfortable with the process, I became oblivious to the usual discomfort that came with navigating the day (and night!) wearing a flimsy pad. Depending on your flow, you don't have to think about changing anything for 6-12 hours. You practically have to think about it once or twice a day.

Little to no leakage issues

There's very little possibility of leakage while doing almost *anything* if you wear your cup right. You can swim, stare at your laptop from your bed, exercise, dance, toss and turn when you sleep and you won't have to remember to be especially careful.

However, you have to learn to get the cup insertion right. This will take a few tries with a cup, but the struggle will eventually pass. You can wear a pad during your transition to the cup at first. But trust me, switching to a cup will be one of the happiest decisions



you ever make. Read manuals and check out YouTube videos to understand better.

Feeling more connected to your body

While this sounds new age-y, wearing a cup has allowed me to understand my mind-body connection during the cycle better. Okay but why is that relevant? Simply because our female bodies are miracles and feeling connected to it and understanding exactly how much blood you lose makes you hate this important time less. You can also figure out what activities you'd like to engage in, or just switch off and rest if you want. Also, you're likelier to get a better night's sleep, because you won't have to think about changing for 6-12 hours!

At the risk of too-much-information, I'd also like to encourage women who might

feel irked by the thought of wearing a cup up their base. I was weirded out too, at first. But the process of learning my body and my reproductive area has helped me learn and appreciate it better.

No more hiding or changing plans

Picture this; it's been a few hours on your second day and you're in a public place, and you wish to discard your used pad. You head for the nearest washroom, but to your dismay, there are no trash cans inside. With cups, it's only about the hassle of emptying and washing it and putting it back in—and not for hours at a time. You won't have to feel like you should change or power through hectic travel plans or activities because your cup will carry your worry, literally! Fun personal fact, I taught myself swimming in

my adulthood on a trip wearing a cup!

Imagine never having to wonder how many tampons or pads to take with you when you go out or travel. Because you only need your ONE menstrual cup — for that extra space in the bag and a peaceful mind.

Saving money, time and the environment

You don't have to replace a cup for years. You just have to boil it with water before and after your period. Imagine the time, money, and energy you save on each of your periods because you won't have to buy new pads any more. Also, pads are terrible for the environment. My biggest motivation to ditch disposable period products was to help cure the environment. After I learned that disposable pads are non-degradable (made of up to 90 percent plastic) and will stay in the environment for about 800 years, I wanted to give this sustainable alternative a try. Made from reusable medical silicone, menstrual cups last up to 10 years and as you only need one, you can only imagine how much of waste you can spare our planet, and your own headaches, to dispose with discretion.

So are you ready to give menstrual cups a try?

By Dibarah Mahboob

Photo: Collected

Dibarah is an artist and nature-lover.