

# POSTPARTUM EATING DISORDERS

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Postpartum can be especially challenging for folks who lived with an eating disorder (ED) during or before their pregnancy. Others may be more vulnerable to developing disordered eating patterns. Folks may feel like they lack control in their lives, feel pressured to lose the 'baby weight,' return to their normal routines, and re-gain a familiar identity – whether psychologically, physically, or both.

## CAUSES OF POSTPARTUM EATING DISORDERS

Postpartum EDs can arise due to various factors. Folks who have had EDs prior to or during pregnancy are at higher risk of living with them postpartum. During pregnancy, folks may refrain from engaging in ED-related behaviors to protect the baby, but after childbirth, they may feel these actions have less impact on the baby, leading to relapse.

Traumatic births and emotional stress may also contribute to postpartum depression, increasing susceptibility to eating disorders. Additionally, the physical changes brought on by pregnancy and societal pressure to quickly return to pre-pregnancy appearance can trigger body image concerns, leading to disordered eating behaviors like restricting intake and excessive exercising.

## REPERCUSSIONS OF POSTPARTUM EATING DISORDERS

### Impact on lactation

EDs can lead to inadequate nutrition of parent and baby, affecting milk quality and quantity, leading to a higher likelihood of stopping breastfeeding early, which can negatively impact a baby's growth and development.

### Impact on infant temperament

A parent's mental well-being can influence the baby's temperament, and disordered eating can cause fussiness, irritability, or difficulty in self-regulation during toddlerhood.

### Impact on Children's Eating Patterns

The effects of postpartum EDs can extend beyond infancy and into the long-term eating patterns of children. Parents with EDs may face challenges in keeping food items available and accessible to their toddlers due to ED behaviors which can lead to overall poor nutritional intake.



## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

### CHALLENGES

- **Mood swings especially heightened anxiety and depression**
- **Difficulties with bonding with baby**
- **Feelings of disconnection**
- **Dissatisfaction with body image**
- **Placing pressure on self to “bounce back”**
- **Obsessions with exercise**
- **Restricting food or food groups**
- **Feelings of shame and/or guilt around food intake**
- **Body checking or consistently weighing self**
- **Social withdrawal or isolation from social activities and loved ones**

## HOW WE CAN HELP

If you or a loved one is living with an ED and experiencing postpartum anxiety or stress, it is important to seek support and receive treatment from a team of dietitian nutritionists and therapists.

