



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**



**SOME THOUGHTS JUST "POP"
INTO OUR HEADS**

● **OUR THOUGHTS CAN BE...** ●



IMAGES



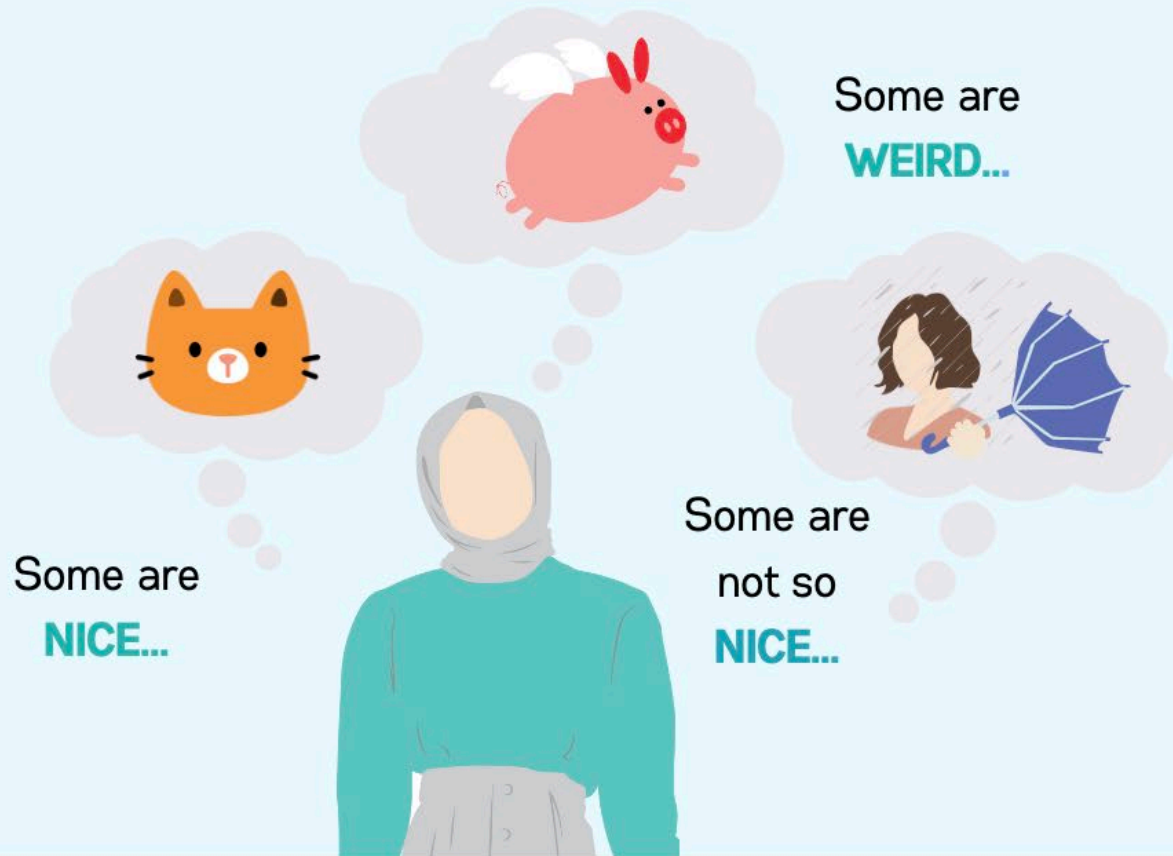
WORDS



URGES

WE HAVE MANY KINDS OF

T H O U G H T S



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



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 my baby suffocates in her sleep?

What if I get distracted and she drowns in the bath?

INTENTIONAL HARM



I could puncture the soft spot on my baby's head!

I could throw my baby off the balcony!

What if I drop my baby?

I could cut my baby with a kitchen knife!



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!**



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

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 **BY ACCIDENT**

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



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

Nope!



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

Nope!



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 known as
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



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?



1

OBSESSIONS and **COMPULSIONS** take over an hour a day



2

Your OCD symptoms are really upsetting to you



3

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



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](https://twitter.com/maternalocd)


 info@maternalocd.org



Postpartum Support International


 www.postpartum.net


 [postpartumsupportinternational](https://www.instagram.com/postpartumsupportinternational)


 HelpLine:
1.800.944.4773

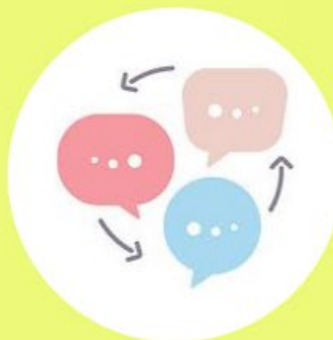


Anxiety Canada

 anxietycanada.com

 [anxiety_canada](https://www.instagram.com/anxiety_canada)

 info@anxietycanada.com



Perinatal Wellbeing Ontario

 perinatalwellbeing.ca

 [perinatalwellbeing_ontario](https://www.instagram.com/perinatalwellbeing_ontario)

 info@perinatalwellbeing.ca



Crisis Services Canada 1-833-456-4566 toll free; Text: 45645

*This version has been edited for dissemination in Ontario with the generous permission of PARLAB

UBC PERINATAL ANXIETY LAB



www.instagram.com/parlab.med/



www.twitter.com/par_lab



www.facebook.com/ubcPARlab



www.parlab.med.ubc.ca