

Hi, my name is Jana. I am the proud mother of a handsome baby boy named Jack, who was born in January 2008. This is my story about my experience with postpartum depression.

My husband and I are high school sweethearts and we married in 2006. We decided that we wanted to start a family and became pregnant that Christmas. We were thrilled with our exciting new adventure and shared it with our families. However, this happy time ended almost as quickly as it began. I miscarried at around 8 weeks and was devastated. I felt as though someone had just played the cruelest joke on me and I couldn't understand why it had happened. Thanks to the help of my husband and my family, I came away from this experience with more strength and forced maturity.

My husband and I waited the suggested 3 months after my miscarriage before trying again. Luckily, we became pregnant quickly. However, this time we were very protective of our little joy and chose to wait to tell anyone until we had cleared the first trimester.

My pregnancy had some bumps along the way. I was extremely sick with morning sickness the first trimester and had to be medicated to control my sickness. The second trimester was fairly uneventful. In the beginning of my last trimester, the baby was eager to enter this world and tried to make an early debut at 28 weeks and 30 weeks with the onset of preterm labor. Luckily, we were able to stop my labor and I was placed on bed rest until 36 weeks.

It was important for me to have a natural, drug-free labor and I contacted Chris Goldman to be our doula. Chris was very helpful throughout my pregnancy and always answered my calls and emails quickly and with care.

My due date came and went ... no baby. A week later, I woke up with cramps and knew that "today was the day!" I labored at home until midnight before we all went to the hospital. My "birth team" consisted of my husband, my mother and our doula. I successfully labored and delivered without pain medication and Jonathan Edward Schalk was born at 6:07 a.m.

At first, everything was going great. I had given birth to a beautiful baby boy. He had successfully nursed within the first 5 minutes of life and seemed to be doing great. Family and friends visited our new little family at the hospital and were overjoyed with our newest addition. I remember feeling like I was in a fog, but I figured that all first time moms must feel like this. Little did I know that I was beginning to embark on one of the most difficult journeys of my life.

We were discharged from the hospital the next day. As my husband and I drove away from the hospital, I remember thinking to myself, "What do I do now?" I cried the entire way home. We all thought I was just emotional and overtired (I had been awake for over 48 hours with only 1 hour of sleep).

I am fortunate enough to have an amazing husband and family. My husband stayed home the first week and my mother stayed with us the second week. I had a difficult recovery from my birth and I eagerly accepted all the help that I was receiving. Looking back, I can see the red flags starting to appear during the second week. My husband, JP, would leave for work around 6:30 a.m. and my mom would arrive around 7:30 a.m. I would begin to cry as JP would start to leave for work and that hour before my mother arrived felt like an eternity. The week with my mom flew by and before I knew it, she had returned to work and I was on my own.

I was struggling with breastfeeding and was very disappointed in myself for not getting the hang of it. This frustration and disappointment slowly began to build and I felt overwhelmed. My sister-in-law had recently given birth to her third baby girl and I asked her for help. She came over and gave me some pointers. I watched her breastfeed her daughter with such ease and love. I could tell that she had already created a strong bond and love with her daughter. I couldn't understand why I didn't feel this connection with Jack and wondered what was wrong with me.

The third week I hit rock bottom. I would hear JP's alarm go off and start crying. He would try to comfort me by telling me that I was a great mother and I was doing great. This would usually upset me even more because I didn't feel as though it was true. I would beg him to stay with me and not leave me with our baby. I was terrified of the thought of being alone with him. I could tell that I was worrying my husband. I was worrying myself.

I would cry the entire day, sometimes 8 hours straight. I performed all my motherly tasks, but I did it robotically with no love or affection. I felt no connection to this little person that my husband and I had created. Jack would look up at me and I would look away, cold and disconnected. I felt nothing.

This cycle of feelings intensified with every passing day. Friends and family would stop by and check in on us. I would watch them hold and kiss and love my son. I didn't understand why or how they could love him and I felt nothing. I started to hate myself for not being a good mother and felt incredibly guilty.

During this time, JP and my family knew that I was struggling. They did all the "right" things. They tried to alleviate any additional stress and would help in any and every possible way. This only made me feel worse. I felt incapable of being a mother, a wife, and a living person in general.

At the end of week 3, I was in the lowest place I have ever been. I finally, with much hesitation, talked to JP about my feelings. He looked terrified as I sobbed through my feelings and state of mind. I told him that my mind started to wander to some very dark places. I would be taking a bath and think to myself, "What if I just slipped under the water and drowned?" Another common thought was, "Maybe I will trip and fall down the stairs." I also told him that while I was driving the other night (without Jack; he was at home with my husband), I intentionally ran a red light and thought, "It wouldn't be the worst thing if I got in a car accident." JP looked scared and hurt. He made me promise that I would call my doctor the next day and get in to see her.

The next day was a Friday and I did not call my doctor. I knew that JP would be home for the weekend soon and thought that together, we could handle this on our own. I thought wrong.

By Monday, I was feeling terrible. Breastfeeding was going terrible for me and I needed professional help. I convinced myself that all these feelings were because of our breastfeeding issues. In my mind, I just needed some help with breastfeeding and everything would fall into place. I was very determined to continue with breastfeeding because I felt as though it was the one thing that made me a mother.

JP and I went to the hospital and met with the lactation professionals. They gave me great advice and helped me with different holds and positions. I cried the entire time; I couldn't stop. I told him how I felt as though my world was collapsing around me; how I kept falling deeper and deeper into a black hole with no hope of getting out. I felt

hopeless, guilty, overwhelmed, and alone. The nurse immediately called my doctor, with my permission, and set up an appointment that day.

Even though I had considered myself educated about PPD, I didn't think it could happen to me. Perhaps this is why this form of depression is often missed. I felt ashamed and disappointed with myself. It was difficult for me to admit and I felt embarrassed to some degree.

After meeting with my doctor, she prescribed Zoloft and encouraged me to seek counseling. I was concerned that it would affect Jack through my breast milk, but they reassured me that it would not harm him. "A happy and healthy mother is the best thing for the baby," she said. They also informed me that the medicine could take up to two weeks to kick in and to call if I needed anything. I left the office with a prescription and filled it on my way home. I had much hesitation about taking medicine to feel better. I felt as though I was a strong individual and did not want to be dependent upon a pill to feel better.

I began taking Zoloft and expected instant results. Obviously, this did not happen. Over the next two weeks, I felt as though I was on a rollercoaster. I would start feeling better and happier, but then I would crash again. Luckily, my "crashes" became less severe and less often. I started writing in a journal when I was feeling better. Then, when I would crash, I would read my journal and remember those feelings. While I didn't feel happy during this time, it was comforting to read and see that I was getting better. Around the third week my emotions had regulated and I no longer experienced spells of sadness and self-pity.

I also began seeing a counselor on a weekly basis to discuss my experience with postpartum and sort out all of my feelings. The first counselor and I did not "click," but I found a connection with my second counselor. I would like to stress that it is important to find a counselor that you can relate with. There are good and bad counselors out there so please don't give up if the first one isn't a good fit.

It took about three weeks after I had regulated my hormones to become bonded with Jack. Now, I look at him with such love and joy whereas before I felt disconnected and emotionless. I understand why people say that having a child is the greatest joy two people can experience. I am absolutely in love with my child and savor every moment (the good and the bad). I enjoy being a part of my child's life.

I think back on the first nine weeks when I was in "Postpartum Land," and can see all the red flags. I felt so alone, helpless, guilty, and sad. I thought that I had made the biggest mistake of my life by having a child and thought that I would never enjoy my life again. The strange and scary thing about PPD is that you feel like the black cloud above you will never clear. It is not like any other sad or low place; it is in a league all by itself.

My advice to anyone that has PPD or thinks that they may have PPD is to seek professional help immediately. This is not something that you can beat by yourself; mind over matter doesn't work in this situation. Also, it is important to have a support group. I am fortunate enough to have my family as well as my husband's family live locally, but I know that not everyone has this luxury. Doula's of Central New York, support groups, hospitals, and even your OB's office can help; all you have to do is ask (which is sometimes the hardest part). Lastly, know that you will get better; it just may take some time.

Please feel free to contact me. I often wished that there was someone that I could talk to while I was going through all of this; someone that I could relate with and had walked this lonely path. My email is jcarter17@gmail.com. Please do not hesitate.