When the Joy is Missing: An Organic Perspective on Postpartum Depression

Written by Marcy Axness, PhD
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Postpartum depression is one of those everyday terms we use, though few of us understand what it means. We know it is important and serious, but it remains abstract. How does one recognize postpartum depression? What does it feel like?

A simple web search provides these symptoms: extreme fatigue, loss of interest in activities, sleeplessness, sadness, tearfulness, anxiety, hopelessness, irritability, appetite change, poor concentration and feelings of worthlessness and guilt.

As vague and complex as this may seem, postpartum depression can almost always be detected by a single screening question: Does the mother feel joy? If she suffers from any form of postpartum depression, it’s possible she’ll say “no” outright. But she’ll also be likely to hedge, with words like, “I know I’m supposed to feel joy... and sometimes, occasionally... there are brief hints of joy...”

Many new mothers experience what I call Chronic Covert Postpartum Depression (CCPD). They suffer behind a façade of frantic perfectionism that effectively obscures the possibility of even considering whether something could be wrong.
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