

I wasn't prepared to feel the way I did.

"By all accounts, I had no risk factors for a PMAD when I became pregnant. I was 28 years old, first baby, supportive husband and family, good job, and an uneventful pregnancy. Until week 34. At that point I was showing signs of elevated blood pressure. Two weeks of bed rest and a lot of checking in with the OB office for urine tests. I hated being on bed rest and I was very disappointed that I wasn't able to "nest" like I had been planning for months. I felt trapped and like a prisoner in my own home. I was like a dog shaking with angst and anticipation to get out of a kennel when my husband would get home and say "let's get you out of here...let's go for a ride." I hated being shut in. I hated feeling alone. I was ready to be done with pregnancy but understood it was too early yet, so I waited and pouted. At 36 weeks and 5 days, I went for my weekly appointment and the OB did not have good news for me. I remember seeing her face and saying "I'm not going back home today, am I? I'm not leaving here without a baby, am I?" I was devastated. My body had let me down, had let my baby girl down. And the only cure was to deliver her...early. Pre-eclampsia was the disease. Delivery was the cure. After a pretty routine induced vaginal delivery, I delivered an itty-bitty 5-pounder. But I remember so very little of it...magnesium sulfate is a powerful medicine. I don't remember her being placed on my chest. I don't remember hearing her cry. I remember that I did not cry...tears of joy or otherwise. I just remember being numb. For the next two days, it felt like that. Numb. Physically. Psychologically. Who was she? Was she mine? I didn't feel anything towards her...but I knew enough to know I should have felt something. So, the best I could do was feel an enormous sense of guilt for not falling in love at first sight. These feelings lasted for weeks...an overwhelming sense of duty and obligation which I met, but never with joy, never with calm...and always with this crushing weight of anxiety. Breastfeeding was a failure. I couldn't relax, she couldn't latch. I remember feeling a great sense of relief when I went for my two week post partum and the OB said, "well your blood pressure is still too high I can switch your med to something stronger but you shouldn't breastfeed on it." I don't think she even finished her sentence when I practically yelled "switch it! That's fine!" Whew...a legitimate reason to not breastfeed. It was like a get out of jail free card! I got a little better in the days after...others could finally help me with the feeding. But it didn't last. Within two weeks, she and I were at her check up...and the guilt trip for not breastfeeding was applied heavily by her pediatrician. We also started suspecting that she was a "silent" reflux baby which was later confirmed after multiple rounds of acid reflux meds, formula changes, sleep positioning, etc. It seemed for the first four months of her little life that she cried non-stop when she was with me.

I was nervous, anxious, and trying so hard to love her and meet her needs, but I could not figure them out. I was stuck, felt like an absolute failure as a new mom. This was made worse when others would hold her and like magic, she would hush and calm...when I'd ask the daycare staff...pensively..."how was her day?...GREAT! She was so good today, barely cried at all, slept soundly..." I was doing it all wrong and my negative self talk only reinforced every terrible feeling I had about myself. I had convinced myself she was better off without me...I mean I couldn't even soothe my own baby. I was so depressed. So devastated that I wasn't getting it right, or even close. And felt so guilty, that I wanted to be away from her any chance I got but felt so anxious about leaving her that I never found joy when I did. For months, this was my life. Looking back on it now, there were days where there was sunshine, smiles, joy, laughter, snuggles, cuddles. But in the thick of anxiety and depression, it is so hard to see where the good outweighs the bad. My husband saw that I was fading. He saw that I wasn't enjoying be a mama. He saw that I didn't want to be here anymore for her, him, anyone, anything. And he told me "we need you to get help...your body hasn't bounced back or something...I know you want so much more for us, but something isn't right and it's not letting you find peace." I made an appointment with my GP. I don't think I could even get the words out completely "I think I'm depre..." before I just fell apart in her office, around 8 months post partum. We talked a good while and she helped me so much to understand all that had been going on...was not my fault, and it didn't make me a bad mom, and it never meant I didn't love my baby. I was sick and I wasn't being treated. I started an antidepressant that day...and I was feeling much better within weeks.

Becoming a new mom is hard. I wasn't prepared to feel the way I did. And I wasn't prepared to NOT FEEL the way I didn't. Society, media, stories, etc. shows us fairytale stories of mothers falling for their babies the second they are laid to their chest. But, I assure that is not every mother's experience. Sometimes that thing laid on your chest feels foreign, other worldly, and completely detached from you. And there are a million reasons that could be so. None of them right or wrong. I am sharing my story to hopefully help another mama know...whatever that is that you are or aren't feeling, don't assign judgment to it. Don't let yourself camp out in feeling like you're less than because you do or don't feel a certain way about your baby. Recognize it. And talk to someone who can be objective about it. You are the expert on you. You know when you're not yourself. Getting checked out and the help you need is the most loving act you can do for your baby. A healthy mama...a healthy baby. My "baby" is nearly 13 years old now...and she is every bit a mama's girl. She is the shine to my sun. And I'm so thankful I got help and am still here to share our story." *-Krista G.*