

THE PATIENT PERSPECTIVE:
Jamie Zahlaway Belsito
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***Excerpts from Moms around the United States who
took meds while pregnant and/or Breastfeeding***

I was on Prozac after having my first child due to postpartum depression and depression. Was told it was ok to be on this medication while pregnant. At 34 and half weeks I went into labor with my second child. The doctors tried to stop the labor but she was coming and I delivered her via c-section 5 1/2 weeks early. She was 6lbs 9 oz but her lungs weren't fully developed and she was in ICU for 3-4 days. She was shaky and had tremors when I asked why she was like that they said she was withdrawing from the anti depressant. She only spent one more day in the hospital than I did. She was healthy and spent the next five weeks sleeping (doctors said she will sleep like in the womb until her due date came) Emily is a healthy and happy 12 yr old despite how she came in the world. It came out several months later that women shouldn't be on Prozac while pregnant (go figure) wish I came off the meds while I was pregnant but what was done was done. I'm just grateful that she was ok! Hope this helps you!

SHERI, Nashua, NH

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I'd love to get together and chat about how many of my moms struggle with PPD and self medicate themselves into an addiction. I'd also like to chat about who I need to beg to listen to me about how desperately I need funds to help the ridiculous number of pregnant women and moms in Mass who have NO access to treatment.

JULIE, Quincy, MA; ED of Sober Mommies

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I went on Zoloft when I was still breastfeeding my son 7 years ago, but it was only a few weeks of that since I stopped breastfeeding for other reasons.

I went back on meds for a few years before I got pregnant with my daughter. I stopped all psych meds for the entire pregnancy. I did this with my Psychologist and with the understanding that if I needed meds during the pregnancy we would find what would work and be ok with pregnancy. I didn't have to go on anything until after she was born. I only breastfed her for a few days and then probably 2 weeks or so after she was born, I went back on my psych meds.

SAMANTHA, Bellingham, WA

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I was diagnosed with PPD at my 6 week postpartum checkup in December of 2006. When I didn't pass the Edinburgh, the Dr. told me that there was a therapist onsite who could see me in an hour. She was covered by a grant, so I saw her for 18 months free of charge. She referred me to a psychiatrist at the Gifford Clinic, which is part of UCSD's maternal mental health program. I was put on several different medications for depression and anxiety, but none helped, and one day when I was home alone with my baby, I saw "movies" playing of myself throwing my baby through the entertainment center. I could feel the adrenalin and my body starting to follow through, so I ran into the bedroom, put him in his crib and closed the door. I immediately called my therapist and told her about the episode. We talked for a while and the psychiatrist called me and we talked as well. Someone came home, so I turned off my phone and pretended to be asleep so I wouldn't have to deal with people. Apparently turning your phone off when you're in crisis is not a good thing because the police ended up at my door telling my then husband that they were responding to a call that a woman was going to throw her baby out the window. All I kept thinking was that it wasn't the window, it

was the entertainment center. My husband had no idea how bad things were for me, so until they mentioned Jacob and me by name, he insisted they had the wrong house. They didn't take the baby or me, but I saw my therapist the next morning, and she and my husband convinced me to go inpatient.

When I was inpatient at UCSD, the doctors tried to convince me to stop breastfeeding so I could get on stronger meds. I refused, and had already tried everything that was safe for breastfeeding, so they let me go home after a few days. I kept getting worse, so I ended up at Grossmont Hospital's Psych Ward, where I was finally convinced that the stress hormones in my breastmilk were also harmful for my baby and that the best thing I could do was give my baby a happy mom. I conceded and gave up breastfeeding, which was the only thing that made me feel safe around my baby. They tried med after med, and nothing seemed to work. I was hospitalized 4 times that year and tried pretty much every depression and anxiety med available.

All that being said, the "anxiety" that caused my "movies" could have been the beginnings of psychosis, as several years later I was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. That may be why none of the meds worked. The jury is still out on that. I likely will never know for sure. If you have any other questions, feel free to ask. There's a lot more to my story, but I was trying to stick to meds and breastfeeding.

MARCIE, San Diego, CA

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My first two pregnancies, i did not take any meds. the first pregnancy was my twin miscarriage. I took lorazepam for a week or so afterwards. After Theodore's birth, i took nothing (and suffered greatly with crippling anxiety) until he was 7 mos old. i was diagnosed with depression at that point

and began taking prozac which i have been on since. I was on meds for Darby's pregnancy, breastfeeding and beyond.

MARYANNE, Boston, MA

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I've also been thinking that women should be required to see their midwife or doctor that they saw most often during their pregnancy at their postpartum visit. I was unable to see my primary midwife at my 6 week postpartum and she's the one who knew me and my moods the best. It should be a priority.

Amberly, Mother of 3, Danvers, MA

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A psychiatrist told me there was NO med I could take while breastfeeding. I left feeling broken and even more hopeless.

Becky, Mom of 2, Milwaukee, WI

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From speaking to moms at my groups...most go off meds without the knowledge of the doctor(s). ALSO- when asked about medication history on intake forms it ONLY asks about Current Meds, not PAST MEDS and this is something that needs to change.

Jennifer, Group Leader of a New Mom group in Southern Florida

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I got conflicting info from my OB and Psychiatrist. Finally turned to LactMed and went with the info there. I recommend that website to pregnant/new mamas all the time.

Graeme, Mom of 2, Charleston, South Carolina

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On anafranil and med monitored by a psych during two pregnancies and 3yrs bf with one and currently bf now. Went off during first tri of 2nd pregnancy on my own....BAD idea. My psych was very pro mom med during both....risk vs benefit and as long as i was monitored by her my obs were fine...thankfully. I was given the possible negative outcome during birth...which happened...but nothing horribly serious although glad i was told.

Samantha, Mom of 2, Alexandria, Virginia

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I started Lexapro when my third (and last) son was 3 months old. My family practice physician (and myself) consulted Dr Thomas Hale and his InfantRisk resource, as well as LactMed, and were satisfied with this as a safe medication for me. Im thankful for those evidence-based resources for breastfeeding mothers, and that my Dr knew of them. I wish more providers did.

Carrie, Mom of 3, Anchorage, Alaska

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IBCLC's are the best resource to check meds and breastfeeding. I was lucky to have one; many moms are not. Doctors need to know when it's time to refer their patient to an IBCLC for safe breastfeeding while medicating. It can be done. Sadly, few doctors relay accurate information.

Julie, Mom, Phoenix, Arizona

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I don't think I was on anything during pregnancy but I was postpartum, while breastfeeding. I had extremely low platelets and had to take Prednisone and some other stuff to

raise them. Didn't have much monitoring. I felt pretty much on my own.

Carly, Mom, Philadelphia, PA

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I took Zantac during my first and Prilosec during my second for AWFUL reflux. My midwife encouraged it because she wanted me to be able to eat enough

Lindsay, Mom of 3, Beverly, Massachusetts

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I was on Zoloft for many years before I became pregnant with my first. Both my psychiatrist and OB/GYN would not give me an answer about if I should continue to take it. They both kept on passing the buck to the other provider. I always wonder if they would have given me a straight answer if I wasn't a lawyer. Anyways, I interpreted this action to mean that I should stop taking the meds. I went down slowly, under supervision of both providers. Without the medication I spiraled into a deep depression that resulted in me having to go on short-term disability from my lawfirm job. I couldn't drive, walk, it was awful! I went back to the psychiatrist and said, this can't be good for the baby either and I went back on the medication for the pregnancy and then nursed for 2 years. I never went off when I had the next two and again, continued nursing each for 2 years while on Zoloft. There were NO issues. Boys were healthy, great apgars, and nursed and gained weight.

Lillian, Mom of 2, Topsfield, Massachusetts

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We see conflicting messages from OBs, nurses, lactation consultants and pharmacists given to our moms ALL THE TIME...even providers working in the same office. Wrong information is consistently given.

Sarah, Founder of Moms Mental Health Initiative, Wisconsin
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I was not on meds during or after my pregnancies, but I recently attended the Alaska Psychiatric Association conference, and one of the presenters offered the view that the choice around taking meds perinatal is often framed as risking exposure to meds vs no risk (refraining from meds). This is not an accurate view as exposing a fetus or infant to depression or bipolar or other diagnoses carries its own significant risk. Many prescribers do not take this into account when making their recommendations.

Allison, Mom, Anchorage, Alaska
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Vanessa, Mom of 3, pregnant with #4, Los Angeles, California
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This. I hate this. I have women come in daily - with a different message from every single health provider they see - about meds and breastfeeding. It is so unfair to do this - repeatedly - to a pregnant or new mom who is already struggling with her mental health. we need one message. The risk benefit ration of taking mom off meds and feeling that makes breastfeeding safe is a lie. how about we get our

acts together and let them know they can do both. and they are the best mom for doing so.

Lisa, Mom of triplets, Director, Center for Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders at [Monmouth Medical Center](#)

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I was on blood pressure meds but was taken off after finding out I was pregnant

Leanne, 9 mos Pregnant Mom, Woburn, Massachusetts

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In my experience the majority of providers don't want to take the time to research what meds are incompatible with Breastfeeding (which are very few) and air way to far on the side of caution and tell them to stop or pump and dump. It's shocking to me that obstetricians and pediatricians graduate from med school with little to no education on Breastfeeding.

Cheryl, Mom of 2, Labor and Delivery Nurse at Catholic Medical Center, Manchester, New Hampshire

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I had a plan in place with my psychiatrist - we chose meds deemed safe for pregnancy. My OB immediately stated I should stop them when I came for my initial visit - so I requested an appointment with a neonatal specialist. I brought my plan to him and he said "this is exactly what I would have put you on. This is a fantastic plan and perfectly safe. Anxiety and depression can actually have a much bigger impact on your baby than these medications have." We did develop a plan for my anti-anxiety medicine where I would attempt to stop using it past the 37 week mark to ensure she wasn't born with any in her system.

I was mentally stable throughout the pregnancy and was able to care for my family well during my pregnancy. My daughter was born perfectly healthy, on time and is now 1

and thriving still. My postpartum period was much more easily handled because I had a plan in place and I felt confident. If I had listened to my OB I don't know what would have happened - but we have to self advocate. A lot of them don't know psychiatric meds - they aren't trained enough to even understand what is safe and what isn't. They tend to nix them all because it's safer for them since they don't know. It doesn't have to be that way...

Meaghan, Mom, Rochester, New York