



# MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH NOW

supporting the well-being of growing families



## Vanessa Benson

I am a 31 year old mom of 2 boys. I had postpartum depression with anxiety and panic after the birth of my second son 2 years ago. I had experienced some baby blues with my first son, but it dissipated once my son started sleeping through the night. My second son's birth hit me like a train.

I had a normal healthy pregnancy and relatively easy birth after being induced, but I could tell in the first week I wasn't feeling quite right. I was crying a lot and was feeling generally anxious. It was when my son was six weeks old and sleeping for 8 hr stretches and I was awake that I realized something was very wrong. I had virtually stopped sleeping – only getting about 45 minutes to no sleep at all daily for 11 days. I would wake up from that sleep in a full panic attack, heart pounding, nauseous in a cold sweat. I had never had a panic attack before so this scared me. After spending night after night on the internet I thought it might be PPD. I had no desire to eat, no desire or energy to do anything but lay out in the sun. I thought my life was over and I would never feel "normal" again. I cried a lot and felt bad that I felt so bad. Nothing was particularly wrong. I have a great and supportive husband, a beautiful son and a newborn baby. I thought that I should be able to snap out of feeling bad. Feeling bad turned to feeling worse and got to the point where I wished I could disappear; just fade away and that my kids and husband would be better off without this shell of a person I had become.

I first turned for help from my OB, whom I thought would surely have seen this before, then my general doctor. They both thought I was having a hard transition to motherhood and prescribed sleeping pills. These pills did not work. I later learned that they work on a different part of the brain, not the part I needed. My son's pediatrician is the one who actually recognized my symptoms, pulled my husband aside and gently advised we seek help. I found a wonderful therapist who works specifically with women suffering from PPD. She gave me my first ray of light that I would recover and my condition was very treatable. I was referred to a psychiatrist who helped normalize my condition and again assured me it was treatable. I was still skeptical and hesitant about taking medication, but I knew I could not continue the path of sleeplessness and being unavailable to my husband or children. After my first night of medication, I was on a steady incline to recovery. I was prescribed Paxil and Klonopin for a period of time, and now am medicine free and thriving.

I am thankful for having had this experience since it has opened my heart to other women's hurt and given me a new appreciation for life. I have vowed to not hide this part of me and share with anyone who needs to hear my story, that they can get better and that this IS treatable. We are even talking about child number three, which in my darkest days I never thought would be possible.