

Case Study #5. PPD recognized after stopping breastfeeding

The patient is a 30-year-old multiparous woman who had her third child, a boy. She is in for her follow-up appointment. Screening with the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) reveals that she may be depressed. In the course of your discussion with her, you discover that the depression “really hit hard” around the time she ceased breastfeeding, about 2 weeks ago. The patient shares that she wanted to continue breastfeeding but her baby wouldn’t latch on, and she found it to be too upsetting to keep trying.

Question

1. What might be the significance of the timing of stopping of breastfeeding and the onset of depression?

Cessation of breastfeeding normally will not lead to depression. It is more likely that the depression actually predated the cessation of breastfeeding. It is common for depressed and anxious mothers to have problems in breastfeeding because their emotional distress is communicated to the baby. This experience may be unsettling for the infant making feeding difficult. In addition, the discontinuation of breastfeeding, especially involuntary, may be upsetting and stressful to women.

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