

# The unsexy truth of postnatal rage

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*TRIGGER warning: This article deals with some mental ill health signs and symptoms.*

It was 6am and I'd already been awake for two hours. The TV was blaring, the fridge was beeping at me, my one-year-old was pulling tupperware out of the cupboard as I tried to unpack the dishwasher around him.

All of a sudden all I could hear was "mummy, mummy, mummy" over and over again. My skin prickled, my shoulders crept up and my temple started pulsating.

"Mummy, mummy, mummy."

It was my three-year-old in her Little Tykes car in my kitchen. Why? No idea.

"Mummy, mummy, mummy."

I took a deep breath and asked her what was going on. She shrugged. I turned back to what I was doing.

"Mummy, mummy, mummy."

Something in me snapped.

"LEAVE ME ALONE" I roared at my kids. "Get out of my kitchen." I walked (wheeled) them both into the lounge room and slammed the door behind them.

I have never told my kids to leave me alone before (and they haven't for three years ...). In that moment, I forgot all the 'advice' from the parenting Instagram pages, I forgot how I'm trying to teach my three-year-old you don't have to yell to resolve situations, I forgot that whatever she was probably trying to tell me was really important to her.

Instead, I just saw red.

This is the very uncomfortable truth of postnatal rage.

Clinical psychologist at the Gidget Foundation Australia, Chris Barnes, said there are a number of factors that can contribute to postnatal rage.

"Postnatal rage can be caused by a combination of factors including lack of support, overwhelm, anxiety, gender inequalities and society expectations, grief and other types of stress," she said.

"It can affect anyone including non-birthing parents and parents who have never

had issues with anger, anxiety or depression before."

This wasn't my first incident of postnatal rage, but that didn't make me feel any less guilty, this kind of outburst isn't like me. I'm not one for confrontation or yelling on most days (I'm more passive aggressive when I'm cranky ...)

Long ago, my partner and I decided we want to implement gentle parenting in our

household. On this particular day, in this particular moment, gentle parenting did not feel possible.

Symptoms of postnatal rage include

- Irritability, quick temper and short fuse
- Aggressive urges
- Feeling out of control and screaming or yelling
- Physical responses such as throwing things, kicking or breaking things



Woman holds head in hands in frustration. Picture is by CANVA

■ Scary thoughts of violence towards others or even self

■ Feelings of shame and confusion

Ms Barnes said at the Gidget Foundation they see this kind of outburst as an "excess of emotion" or a "way to avoid sadness and overwhelm".

"Postnatal rage can feel scary at the time as it is intense, bubbling under the surface and it can seemingly come out of nowhere," she said.

Although these feelings aren't necessarily new, the concept of postnatal rage is relatively recent. It differs from the more familiar postnatal depression and anxiety (PND) in that postnatal rage is a symptom or a sign that can sometimes indicate some underlying depression.

What should you do if you're experiencing postnatal rage? Ms Barnes has some advice.

- Notice what your triggers are. Does it occur when baby cries and doesn't settle, when you are hungry, when you feel overwhelmed, when people arrive unexpectedly. What practical things can you put in place to be prepared for these triggers?
- Change the scenery Open the window and get a gush of fresh air, put on some music, get a glass of cold water and feel the refreshing temperature on your lips. Put baby safely in cot and get cup of tea, or call a friend.
- Call in some supports if you are feeling overwhelmed. Do you have friends or family that could relieve some of your load? Help with a meal, a load of washing, or giving you some space alone.
- Find a safe online supportive parent groups. Online parent groups can offer a source of support and shared experience. Moderated groups such as Gidget Virtual Villages are a safe space to share your experience with others in a similar life stage.
- Adjust expectations of self. Even in small ways you can make the day easier if it is overwhelming. Take a little longer in the shower or some time out to recharge.