

Hey, there.

If you've been here a bit, you may have read [my share a while back about my mental health journey](#) during my most recent postpartum season.

And with my daughter having just turned one in November, I've been reflecting back on what a truly wild ride this year has been.

We've been breastfeeding and cosleeping for an entire year now which I am so, so proud of - but when I look back on the last 12 months, and go back there to those places and memories in my mind, I also see and feel so much pain, heartbreak, and struggle.

I guess that's motherhood for ya - **ALL the pain with ALL the joy, ALL at once.**

And one reason it's a bit painful to look back on my experience is because of my intimate and challenging experience with [DMER.](#)

DMER stands for Dysphoric Milk Ejection Reflex, and there isn't a ton of research on it, but it's related to an imbalance in a woman's brain associated with milk production and the letdown - likely an imbalance of oxytocin and/or serotonin, which are feel good hormones. They drop super low before a letdown and don't rise back up in time, leaving the mom feeling absolutely terrible for a few minutes before things balance back out.

For me, it was about a minute before every single letdown and it started about three days in after having Leona - where with every

letdown **I would feel an incredible sense of doom, anxiety, depression, and despair.**

It's hard to articulate exactly what the feeling is like, but when I was asked to describe it in detail I later told my doctor it felt like someone was about to knock on my door and tell me I was in trouble, or that they were mad at me, or give me some terribly bad news. I would feel a wave of panic followed by huge, gross, sinking knots in my stomach and most of the time, tears.

It made me want to **curl up and crawl into a dark hole** and shut my eyes. It made me want to run far away. It made me stressed and angry. And for a while I had no idea it was associated with breastfeeding.

In the early weeks I thought it was just part of the “baby blues” and all the hormonal shifts that occur after birth so I just kind of battled through. But then it kept happening. So I just kept battling.

I thought it would go away. But it just became my new normal. And with a brand new baby exclusively breastfeeding and latching up to a dozen times a day, it was like being on **the worst emotional roller coaster ride of my life.**

Not to mention I was simultaneously holding space for my two year old's very, very big feelings on the daily and solo parenting regularly starting at few weeks postpartum since my husband was in season and constantly on the road.

This went on for weeks, and then months, and then finally around month three a friend sent me a post about DMER at

saying, “Did you know this was a thing?” And I was shocked. It finally all made sense.

The post described the same exact symptoms I was experiencing, and referenced how they happen right before a letdown, and then go away. And it said I could talk to a therapist or my doctor about it.

But I thought, “Ohhh no no, that's ok, now that I know this is associated with breastfeeding I can just identify when it's happening and remind myself it is temporary. What a relief! Problem solved!”

Spoiler: it wasn't.

My symptoms continued, and some of the time I'd be able to focus for a moment while they were happening and remind myself that it was just because a letdown was coming, and that these feelings would pass.

And the milk would always come, confirming it was just a temporary hormone flux. So when I could, I would pause and tell myself, these are not your feelings. They will pass. And it would be ok, kind of.

But a lot of the time I wouldn't be able to recognize that it was the pre-letdown DMER symptoms happening, and I would just sit there feeling extremely awful, and I'd cry, and ride that insane rollercoaster. Then the milk would come and I would remember, “Oh yes, it's just the DMER.” But that would not take away from those first few minutes of sitting there in a soupy, emotional, angry puddle. And round and round we'd go.

Another thing I assumed about DMER was that it would get less intense as breastfeeding went on and my supply established. I knew from my research in preparing for postpartum and breastfeeding that around 3 or 4 months was an impactful time for my supply and that things might get a little less intense after that milestone.

But that was not the case with DMER.

The terrible sensations continued and even worse, I started feeling depressive and anxious symptoms even when a letdown wasn't happening. So it felt like a double punch to the gut - continued waves of doom and gloom around feeding times PLUS a lingering sadness and buzzing anxiety that clouded my day to day. It was not fun.

Meanwhile I had these two beautiful children, an amazing and supportive partner, and more support and love from friends and from this community than I could ever ask for. So I felt really guilty for having such a hard time. And I felt like a failure. I was trying to continue sharing openly and honestly here with Centerline too, but I felt like I had lost the ability to function. And like I was just out there, floating. Lost. Untethered.

But I kept pushing through, because what else could I do? Life went on and the world continued turning and my kids continued needing me. So I kept showing up. And one day I reposted something about DMER, and a friend and local provider reached out encouraging me to come chat with her. I was polite, but resisted. And then around that same time I had some very, very dark days.

I knew something had to change. It's honestly still all pretty blurry, but I remember saying to my husband, "I cannot keep going on like this." And we talked through finding a solution, starting with making that appointment.

And I am so grateful to this day that I did, because I don't know what would've happened or what my life would be like at this point had I kept white knuckling it. I never actually thought about hurting myself, but I had many intrusive thoughts in those darker moments around not wanting to do this anymore. Around being so tired of feeling so much. Around escaping.

I was diagnosed with DMER, PPA, and PPD. And in our conversation that day we also came to the conclusion that I had all of this going on in my first postpartum experience, too. I sat in that office and sobbed, heartbroken that I had been experiencing so much pain and whiplash for so long.

But after that day, I started therapy, took a big social media break, and I began medication. It was scary, but I was finally ready. It was time to move forward.

And it took some time but I am finally ready to share this all with you here, too. So thank you for reading.

I share this info and my intimate experience not to cause concern, or for shock factor, or any reason other than letting every mom out there possible know that if you're having an experience at all like what I described, **you are not alone.**

I thank God and The Universe every day that I had that person in my life who reached out and connected me to support. So if I

can be that person or even that invitation to just one mom, I have done my job.

No matter where you're at in your journey or how this email finds you, I hope you know what an amazing job you're doing. **This motherhood and postpartum shit is NO JOKE.** And yet we're doing it, and we're doing it within a society that oppresses women and doesn't value the work of mothers and that makes everything SO MUCH more difficult than it has to be for moms to thrive, and yet we are still DOING IT. Together. All of us.

So thank you thank you thank you for being here and sharing part of your journey with me and this community. It means more than you know. And you're doing AMAZING, even if it doesn't feel like it right now. Sending all the love.

xoxo

Jenny