She had a plan. To have a natural birth in water. No surgery. No medication. And even heard the word “preeclampsia” in passing from her prenatal care providers as a reason that she might not be able to do a water birth. She was empowered and moving through an effortless and healthy pregnancy — until the 37 week mark.

Unfortunately, Tia’s dreams of a natural delivery did not happen. Her baby girl was born by emergency C-section three weeks early due to HELLP Syndrome - a life-threatening disorder of pregnancy that is a variant of preeclampsia. She had no idea what it was or what it meant at the time. Six years later, she knows all too well that the emotional and physical toll is seemingly endless.

The delivery was preceded by blood pressure of 210/150 and seizures. It was followed by four months in the hospital for Tia: two more seizures, multi-organ failure, damage to her lungs, kidneys and liver. Her blood wasn’t clotting, she was retaining fluids and was swollen. She was intubated, put on a ventilator, underwent dialysis daily, had draining tubes in both sides of her stomach, and a tracheotomy. Tia had to learn to walk, talk and eat again, undergo physical therapy to regain strength, and continue with dialysis for 10 months.

The saving grace? Her daughter was born healthy and was well taken care of while Tia recovered.

But the emotional and physical aftermath was the hardest: severe depression, blaming herself, and constantly asking “what did I do wrong?” Mourning the loss of a planned healthy pregnancy and delivery, missing your baby’s first days, or months as in Tia’s case, is emotionally devastating. It was through the Preeclampsia Foundation that Tia found hope and support for the overwhelming emotional journey. She met other women who had unexpectedly had their birth plans and lives change forever. Most importantly, she learned that her feelings of depression and anxiety were normal. In fact, having preeclampsia or HELLP Syndrome makes a woman 4-10 more likely to be diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She was relieved of blame and depression through the bonds of friendship, support, and better understanding of how this life-threatening condition can strike any woman, any pregnancy. And she learned that African American women are at increased risk and often fare worse outcomes. She is now committed to being a voice for moms struggling with the emotions of a traumatic pregnancy.

If you have had preeclampsia or HELLP Syndrome and are having these feelings, talk to your healthcare provider or other mental healthcare professional to get the help you need.

Visit www.preeclampsia.org for more information about the mental health effects of preeclampsia and HELLP Syndrome and how to get on the path to recovery.