

# Birth Trauma

Unfold Your Wings

## What is Birth Trauma?

**Birth trauma is 'in the eye of the beholder'. A traumatic experience is subjective and what matters is how the woman feels about her birth. A woman may have symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or in some cases develop full PTSD following the birth of her baby. Around 1 in 25 women experience PTSD following childbirth, while it is estimated that around 1/3 of women find some aspect of their birth traumatic.**

## What Causes Birth Trauma?

- An emergency situation where the woman's life and/or that of her baby's was at risk
- A difficult pregnancy
- A birth with high levels of medical interventions, such as induction, a caesarean section, episiotomy, or other complications
- Feeling a loss of control, dignity, feeling coerced or choices not respected
- A baby born early/requires care in a neonatal unit
- A birth that results in damage or injury to the woman and/or her baby.
- The loss of a baby
- Medical neglect/poor care

For other women trauma can result from the way she is cared for during her pregnancy, the birth of her baby, or in the postnatal period. It is important to note that trauma can also result from a birth that appears to have been straightforward.

## Finding Support

If you are struggling following a difficult birth, or having a baby in a neonatal unit, getting support is important. You can do this in a number of ways.

- Don't suffer in silence. Speak to someone you trust
- Look after yourself physically, make sure you rest and eat a good balanced diet.
- Ask for help. Your GP, midwife or health visitor can support you to access therapies that can help you to heal.
- Speak to your hospital about your experience. Some women ask to see their medical notes to discuss exactly what happened to them and why. Some hospitals offer Birth Reflection Sessions.
- Find local support groups or support groups on social media such as the Birth Trauma Association Facebook group.



## Signs of Birth Trauma

Common symptoms of birth trauma include:

- experiencing flashbacks, nightmares
- intrusive thoughts related to the pregnancy, birth or the postnatal period
- avoiding talking about the birth or reminders of the birth
- feeling irritable, jumpy or agitated
- struggling to bonding with the baby
- hypervigilance, anxiety, low mood or panic attacks
- feeling disconnected or numb

## Remember

- You are not alone
- Your experience matters
- Birth trauma can be treated
- With the right support you will recover
- You are not to blame

## National Support

Birth Trauma Association  
Make Birth Better  
Birthrights  
Bliss