

Traumatic birth and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Aims of the factsheet

- To help you know more about birth trauma and PTSD
- To share tips and insights to help yourself or support your partner
- To find out what support there is available to you

Please note that this factsheet is concerned with Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurring after childbirth. However, it also includes information for those women who do not have a diagnosis of PTSD but who are experiencing some of the symptoms.

What is Traumatic Birth and PTSD?

Being involved in or witnessing a traumatic event can be upsetting, distressing and confusing. The event may involve the threat of death or serious injury to yourself or another person close to you (for example; to you or your baby during a traumatic birth).

A traumatic birth (or birth trauma) can result in a variety of emotional and physical reactions that effect your day-to-day life.

It is quite normal to experience these reactions following a birth trauma (or other event around the perinatal time) for up to a month after the event.

If these reactions (see symptoms) last for over a month, you may be diagnosed with PTSD by a medical professional.

There is no time-limit on distress. Some women may not develop post-traumatic symptoms until years later or often when they are pregnant again.



Symptoms

You may be feeling some or all of the following:

Reliving aspects

- Vivid flashbacks
- Intrusive thoughts
- Nightmares
- Intense distress at reminders of the traumatic event
- Physical sensations such as pain, sweating and nausea

Alertness or feeling on edge

- Panicking when reminded of the trauma
- Being easily upset or angry
- Extreme alertness
- Disturbed sleep
- Irritability
- Lack of concentration
- Easily startled

Avoiding feelings or memories

- Keeping busy
- Repressing memories
- Feeling detached
- Being unable to express affection
- Avoiding situations that remind you of the trauma

What can I do to help myself?

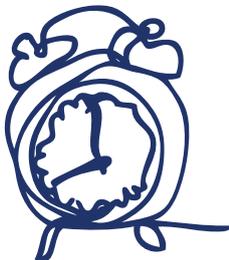
Many women with birth trauma feel isolated. You may find it difficult to relate to or talk to other mothers who haven't had similar experiences. You might also worry about bonding with your baby or how your symptoms might affect them.

You do not have to cope alone. Whether you have been experiencing the symptoms above for more or less than a month, there is support available to you.



Strategies to get support includes:

- Talk to someone close to you
- Speak to your GP, midwife or health visitor
- Contact the hospital to arrange a debriefing and look at the birth notes
- Talk to people with similar experience e.g. Solace for Mothers, Birth Trauma Association or PANDAS Foundation
- Give yourself time
- Consider trying mindfulness www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/mindfulness/
- Complete an online CBT 'Enjoy Your Baby Course' by Two in Mind www.twoinmind.org
- Listen to other mother's experience on the Two in Mind website
- Join an internet forum such as Mumsnet or Netmums
- Join a supportive online community Elefriends (Mind) www.elefriends.org.uk



Treatment

If you've experienced the above symptoms for less than 4 weeks:

- Your GP may recommend that you monitor your symptoms yourself and see if they get worse or improve within one month

If you are diagnosed with PTSD you may find the following treatments helpful:

- Trauma focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- Eye Movement De-sensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Medication – if symptoms are accompanied by depression, anxiety or sleeplessness.
- Group therapy
- Psychodynamic therapy
- You may be referred to treatment by your GP or seek support privately. For more information on treatment for PTSD in general, see our website www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/treatments/



Useful contacts:

Be Mindful:
bemindful.co.uk

Birth Trauma Association:
birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/default.asp

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy:
baccp.co.uk

Mind:
mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd

Mumsnet:
mumsnet.com/Talk/childbirth/a582164-birth-trauma-support-thread

National Centre for Mental Health (leaflets in Welsh and English):
<http://ncmh.info/leaflets/>

Netmums:
netmums.com/coffeehouse/advice-support-40/birth-trauma-support-60/

Pre and Postnatal Depression Advice and Support (PANDAS):
pandasfoundation.org.uk/

Solace for Mothers:
solaceformothers.org/

Two in Mind:
twoinmind.org/

 **mind Cymru**
for better mental health
o blaidd gwell iechyd meddwl



riennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government