

Giving birth, whether it is a first or fifth baby, can be an intense, long and frightening experience. Often coined as one of the 'happiest days of your life' for many people, labour and the birth experience can have a hugely negative impact on them and their families. Following birth, attention often purely focuses on the well-being of the baby with little consideration to the feelings of the mother or birthing person. Comments such as "well at least your baby is healthy, that's what matters", can lead women, birthing people and their birth partners to feel that the trauma they have experienced is being dismissed or belittled.

## KEY POINTS

Symptoms of trauma are in response to a traumatic event. That is, an individual response to a traumatic experience, when you felt that your life or your baby's life was in danger, or you felt scared, alone, helpless, unheard, silenced or dismissed. All of these can occur during pregnancy, birth or after birth.

Many women, birthing people and birth partners talk of experiencing some trauma symptoms in the weeks after the birth of their baby. You may experience: having flashbacks (intrusive memories which may be visual or could be a sound, smell or sensation) or nightmares about the birth; feeling jumpy or on edge, avoiding anything to do with the birth (including subsequent hospital appointments etc.), feeling irritable, feeling your mood is very changeable, having negative thoughts and trouble sleeping.

Many women, birthing people and birth partners may have some symptoms of trauma but without meeting the criteria for a diagnosis. You may feel violated or horrified by your experience. These symptoms can impact on you too, whether or not a diagnosis is present.

Most importantly, it does not matter if others feel that your birth was "textbook" or it "went well" or whether you had a vaginal delivery, caesarean section, lots of medical intervention or none at all. Experiences of feeling traumatised are subjective and very personal. If you feel you need some help to heal from your experience (or multiple experiences) around birth please speak to someone as soon as you can and get the help you deserve.

## WHAT CAN I DO RIGHT NOW?

If you feel that your experiences are having an impact upon your day to day life, your relationship with your baby and/or others please discuss this with your GP, Health Visitor or other health care professional you feel you can speak with.

They can help think with you about who can help you best, this might be with a specialist team or individual for assessment and therapeutic treatment and/or medication.

In some areas of the UK, you can also self-refer to these services. Most people go on to make excellent recoveries with the right support.

### FURTHER READING

There are lots of free resources on the *Make Birth Better* website

You may also wish to visit:

- AIMS [www.aims.org.uk](http://www.aims.org.uk)
- Birth Trauma Association [www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk](http://www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk)
- Birthrights [www.birthrights.org.uk](http://www.birthrights.org.uk)

Books:

- *How To Heal A Bad Birth*
- *Why Birth Trauma Matters*